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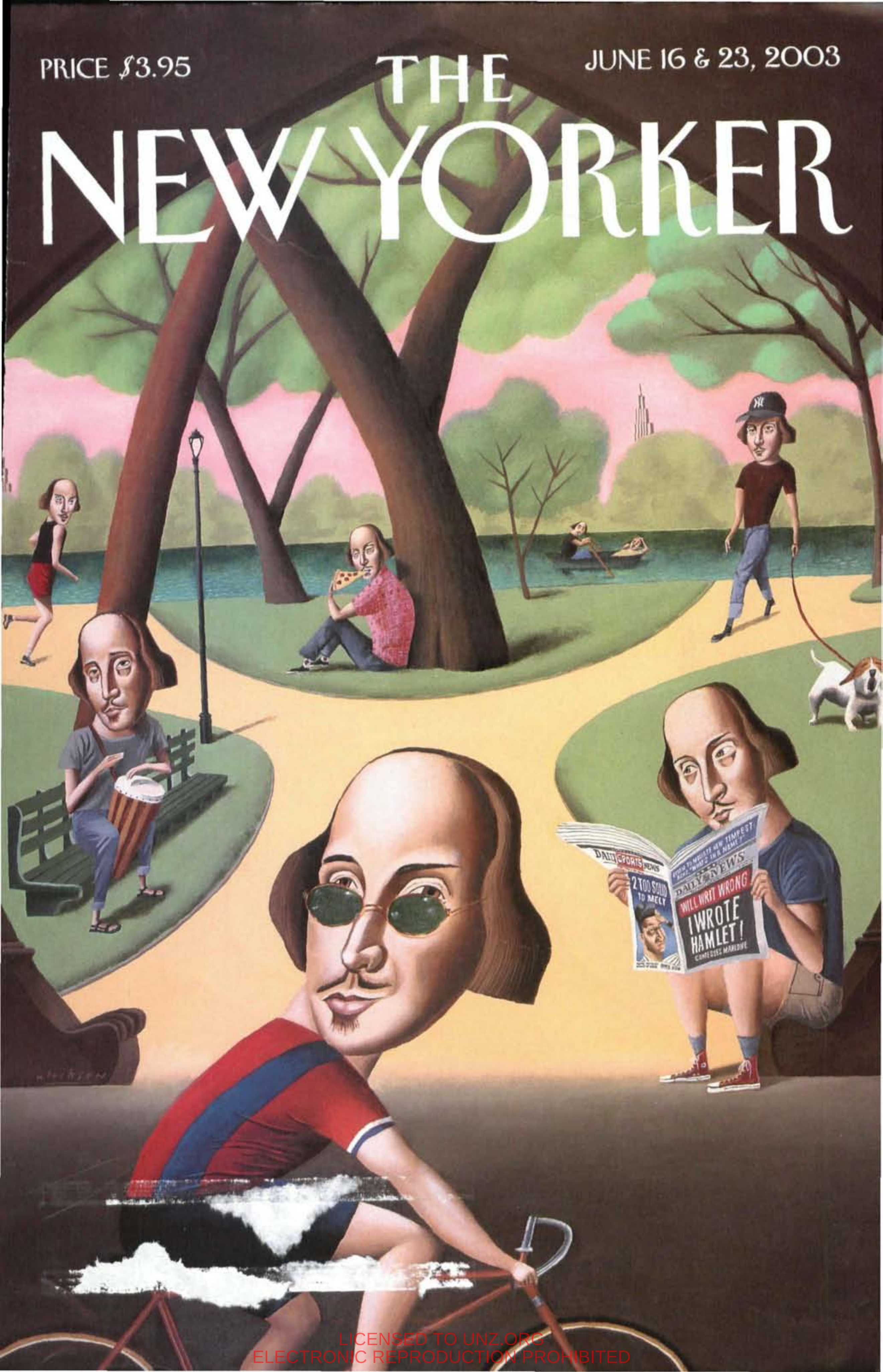
JUNE 16 & 23, 2003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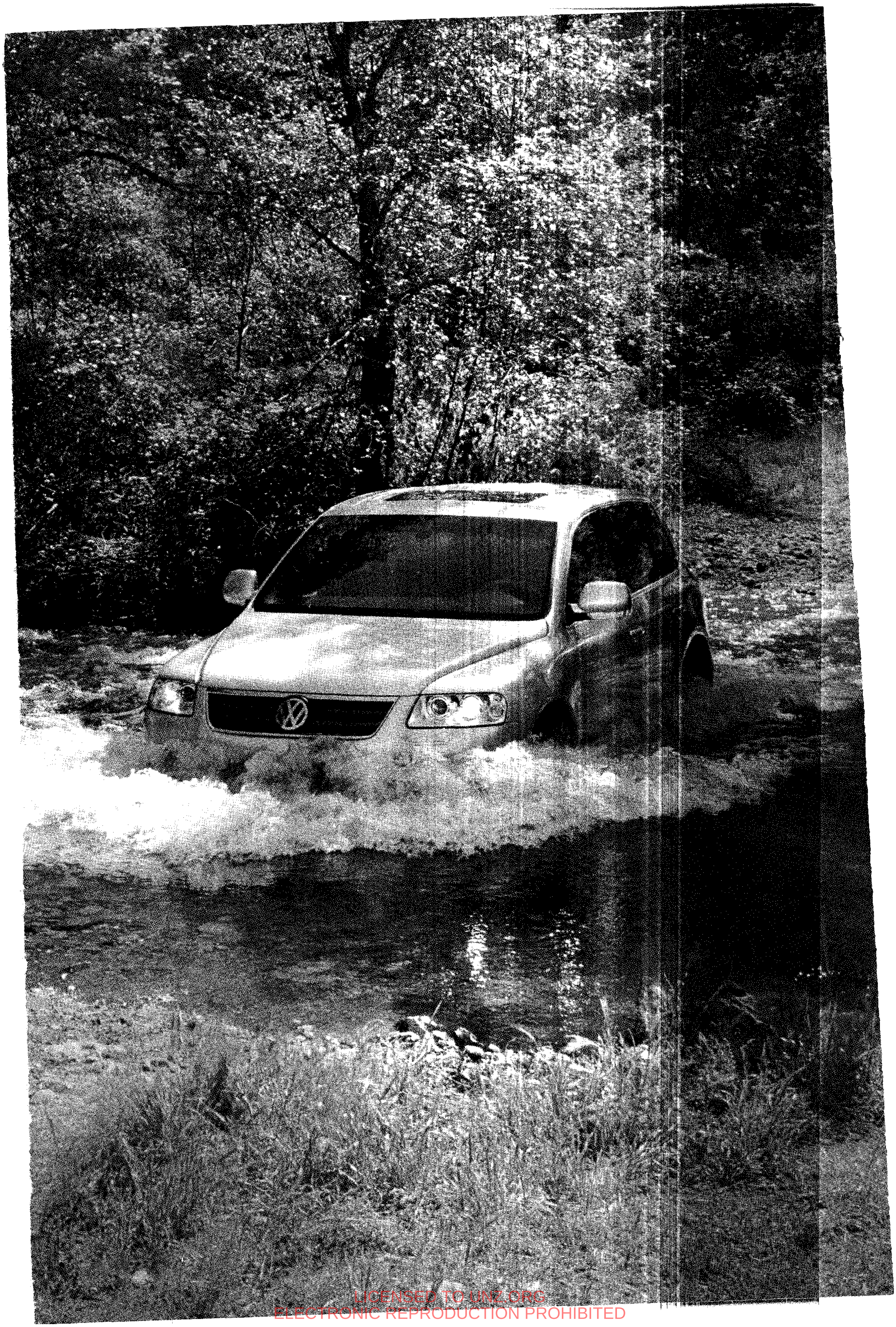
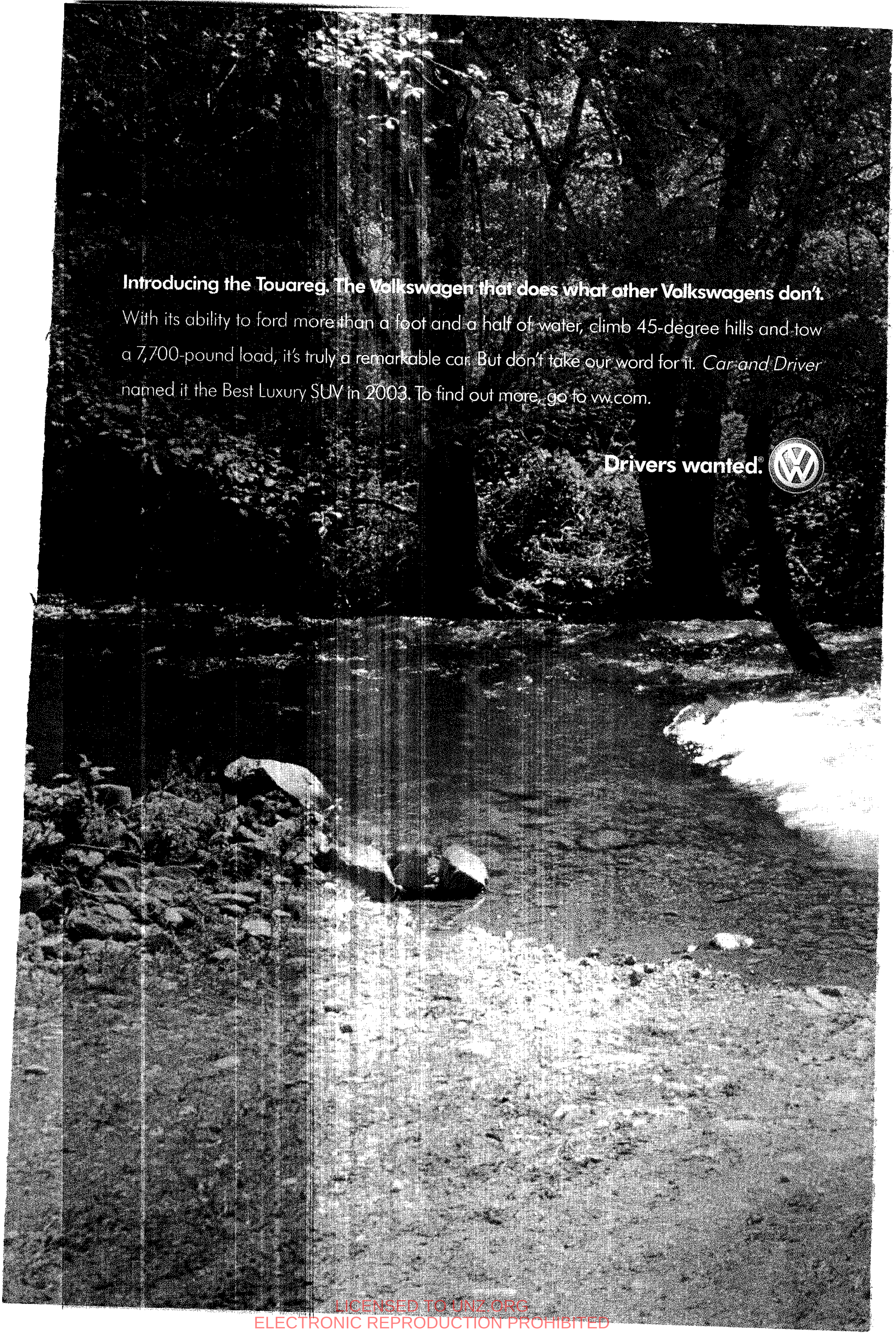
DAILY NEWS
WILL WRIT WRONG
I WROTE HAMLET!
CONFESSES MARLOWE





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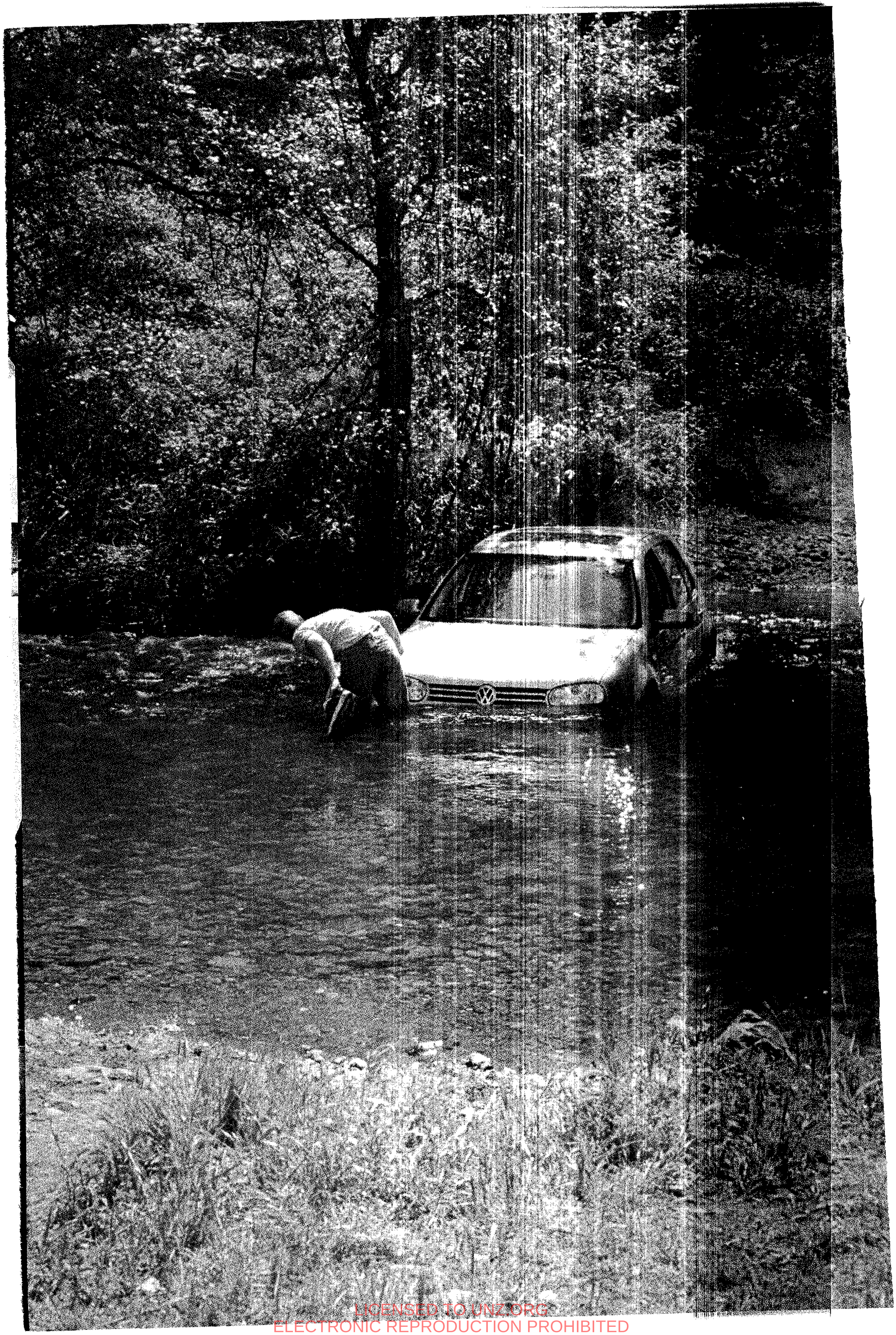

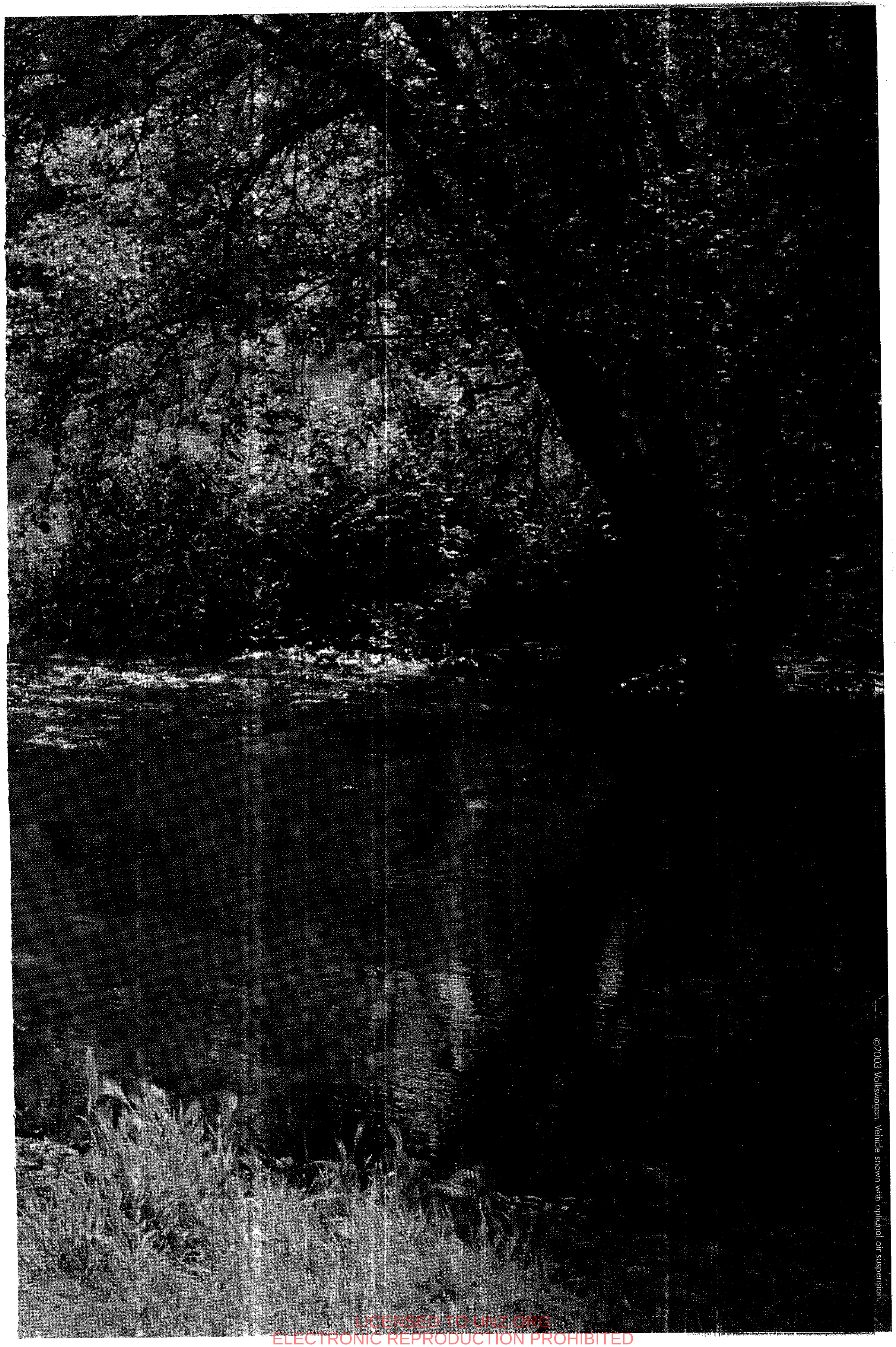

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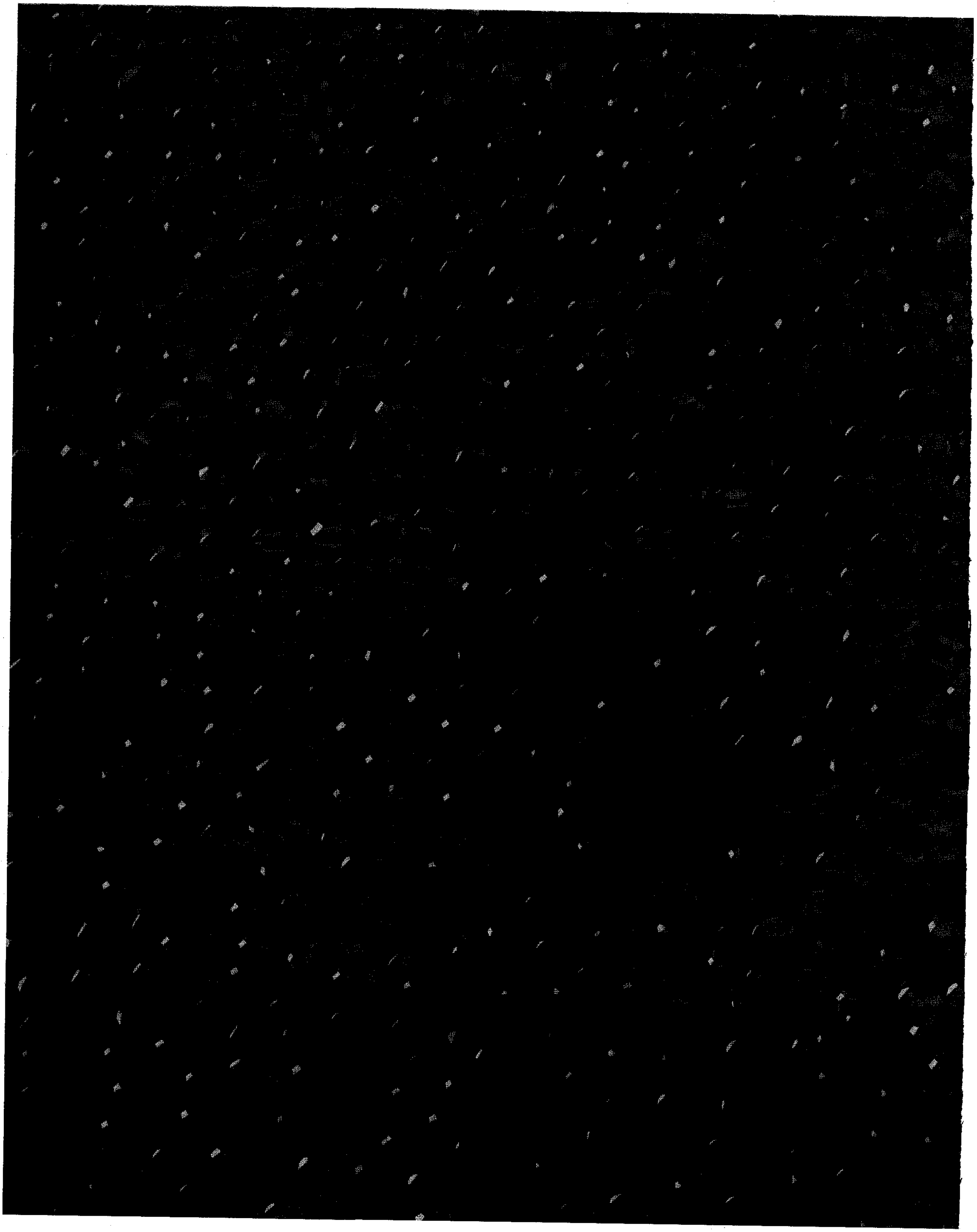

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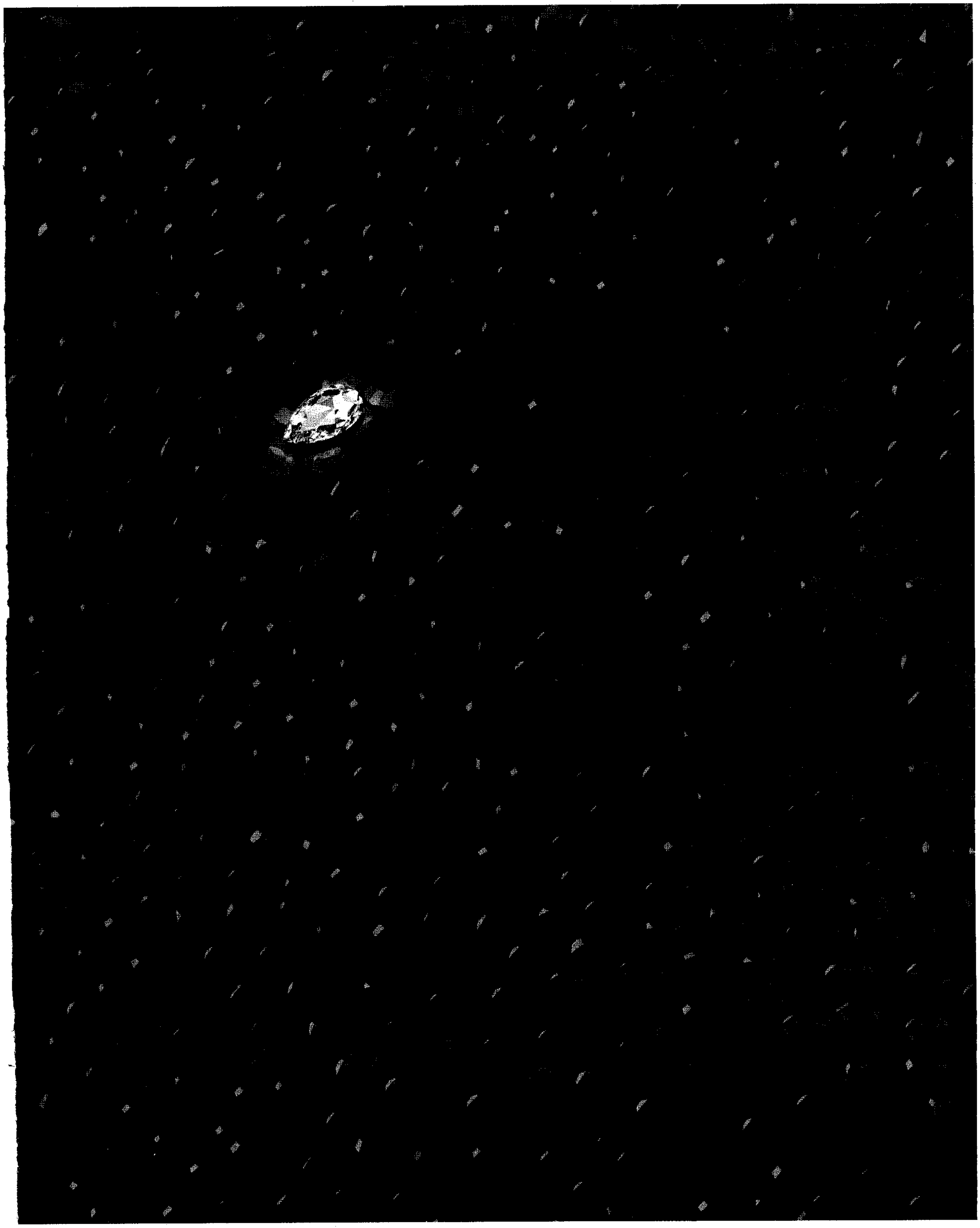

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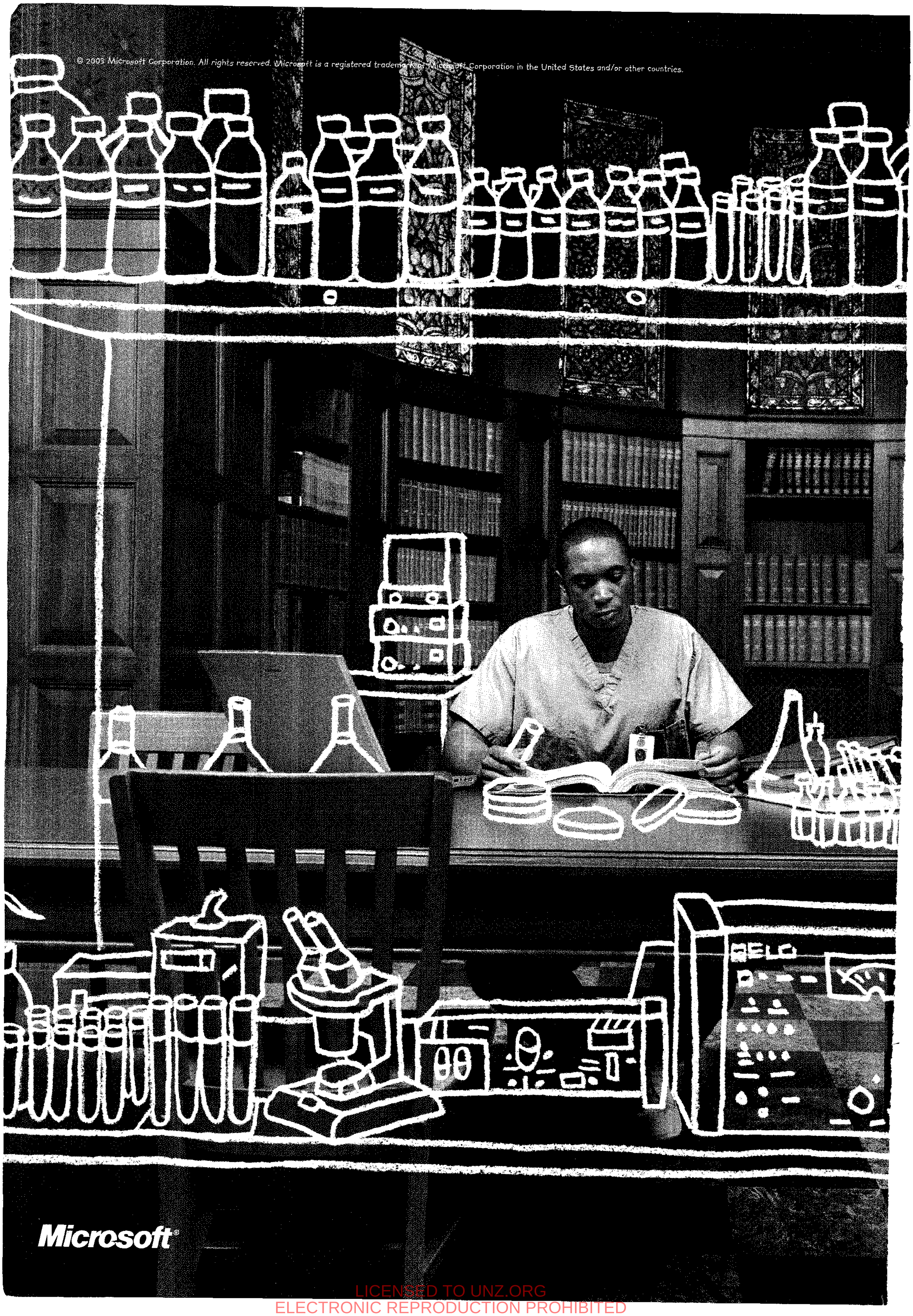

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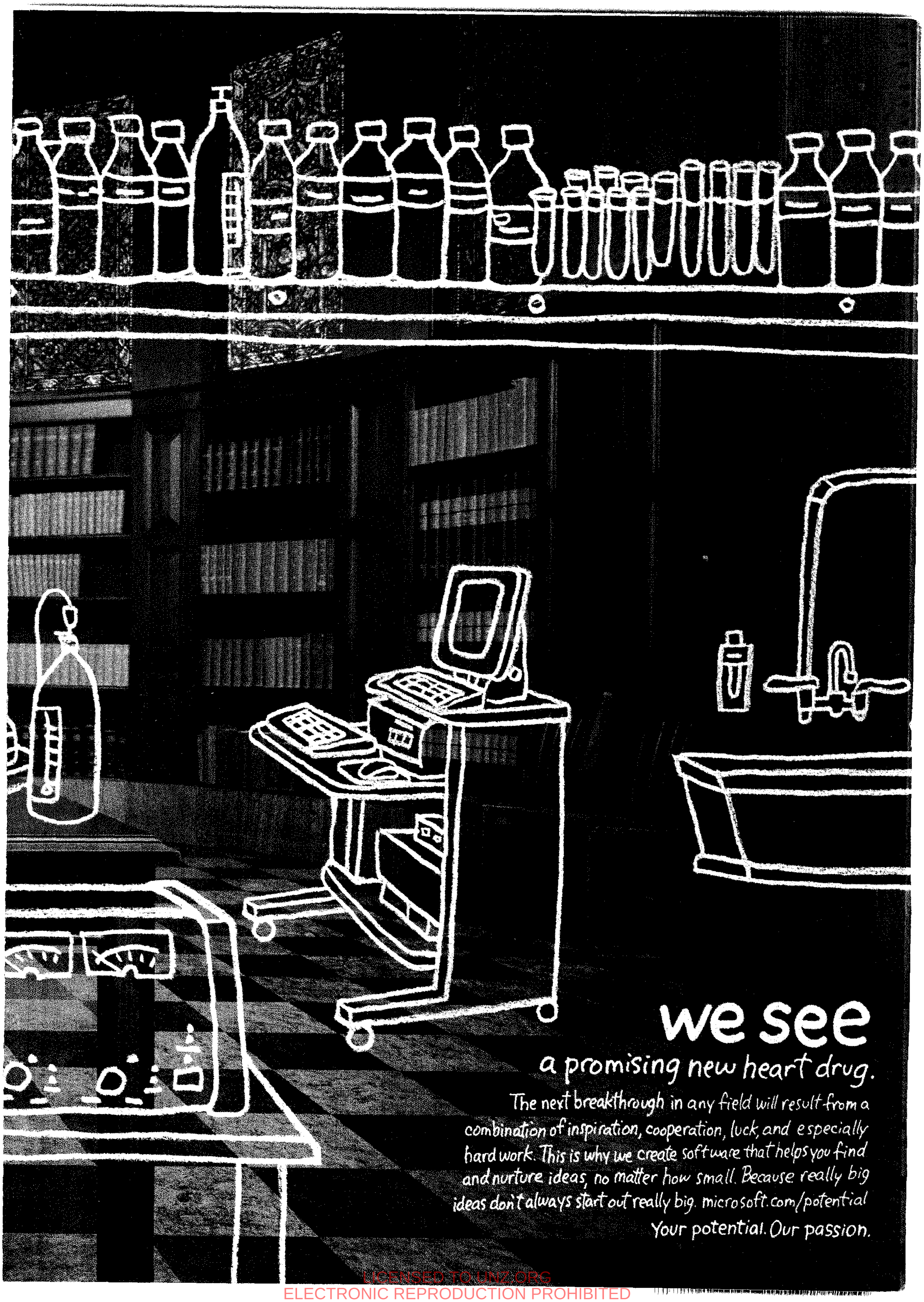
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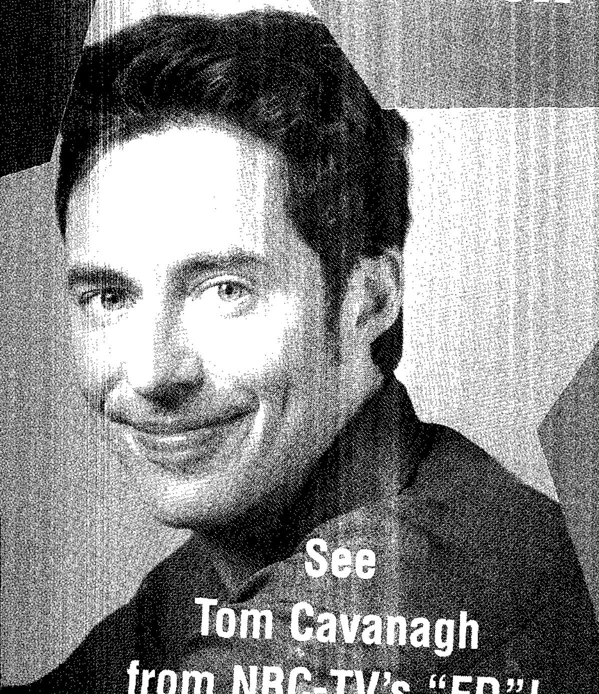

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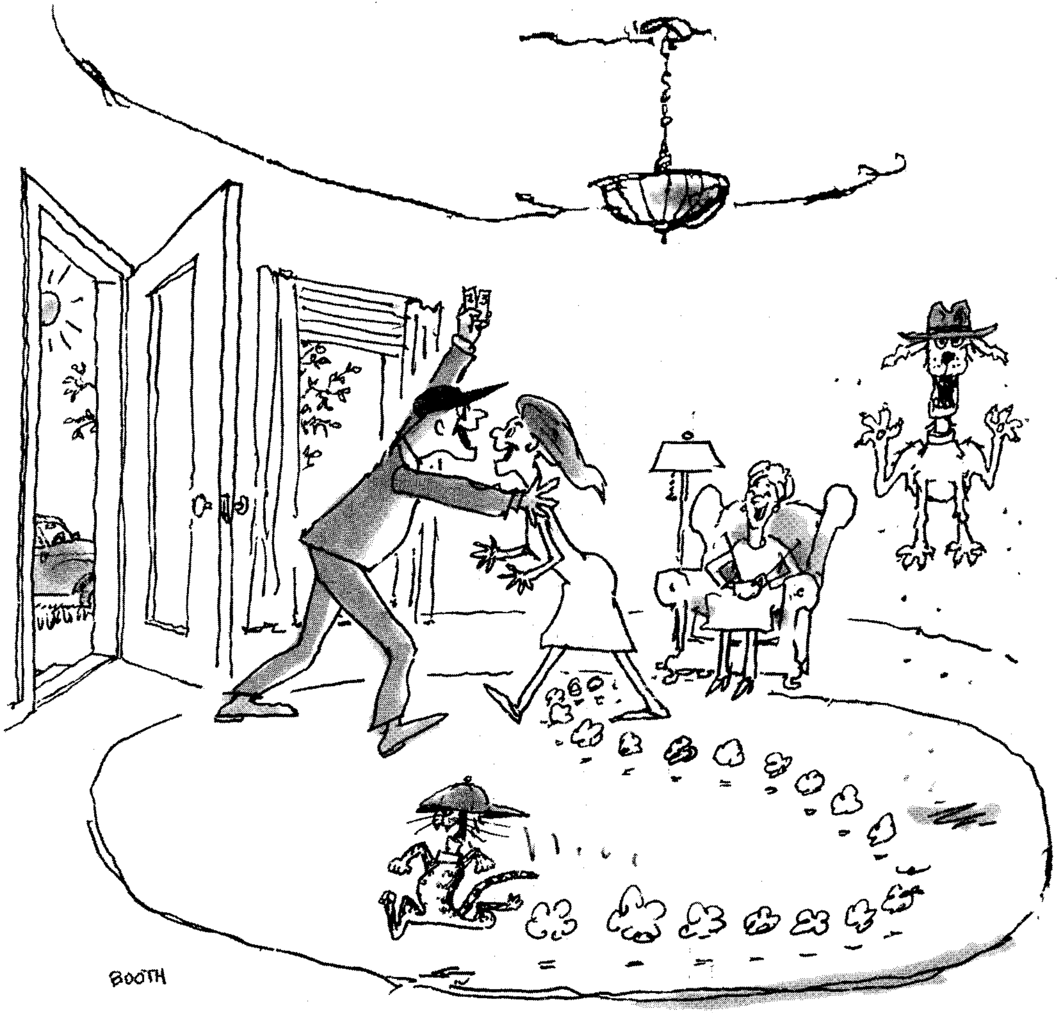

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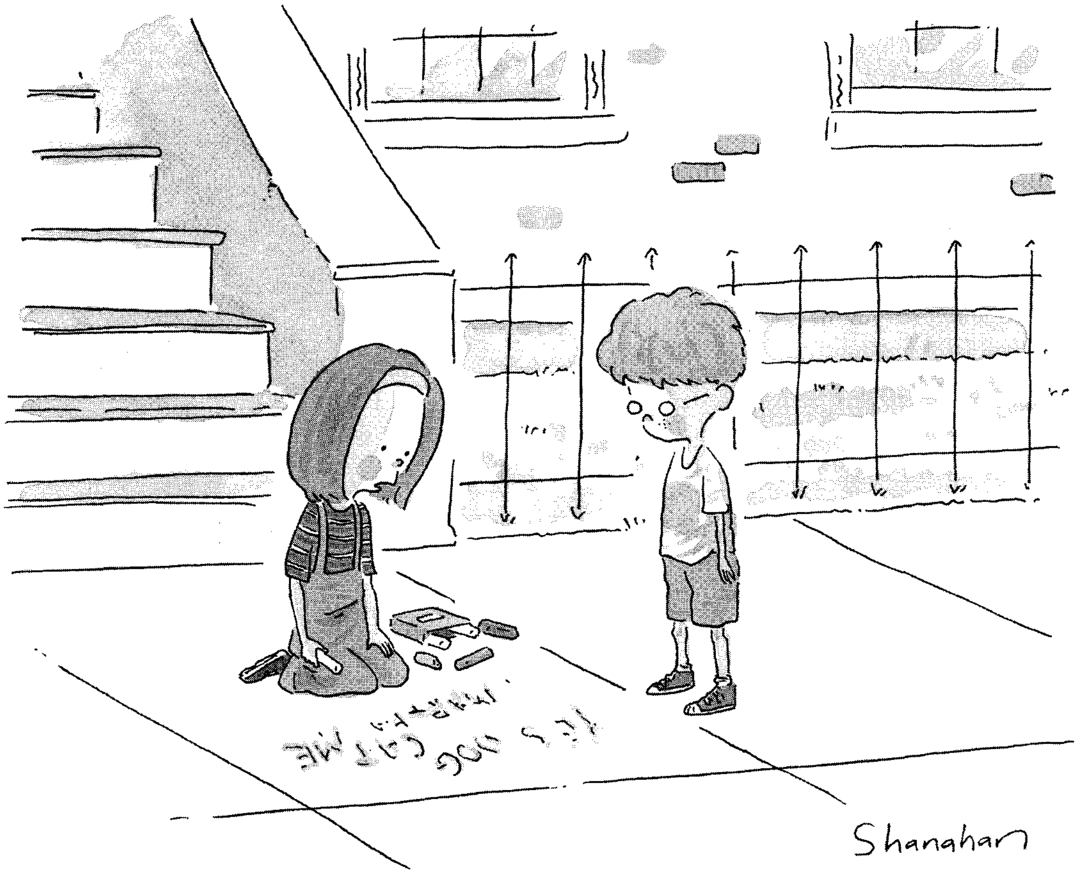

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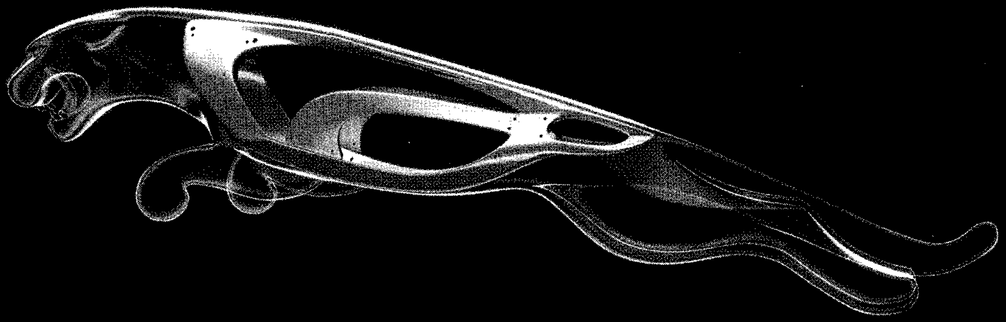

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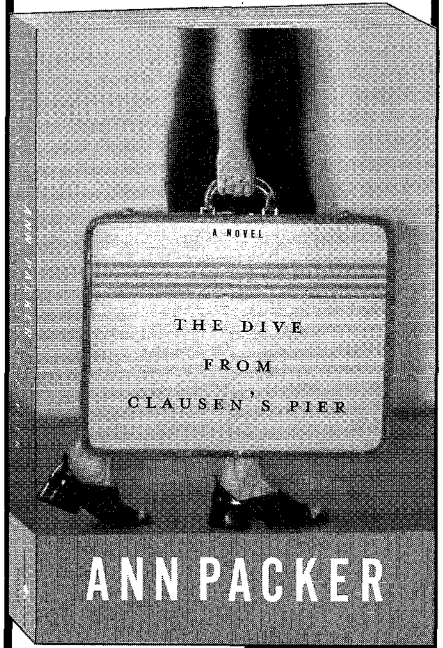

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CONTRIBUTORS

This summer's fiction issue features work by three fiction writers who have not yet published a book.

Heather Clay ("Original Beauty," p. 78) is completing her first novel. This is her first published story.

Lara Vapnyar ("Love Lessons, Mondays, 9 A.M.," p. 133) has a collection of short stories, "There Are Jews in My House," coming out in December. She came to the United States from Russia in 1994.

Daniel Alarcón ("City of Clowns," p. 156) is a student at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He was born in Lima, Peru, and returned there on a Fulbright scholarship in 2001. This is his first published story.

David Sedaris ("Our Perfect Summer," p. 96) is the author of "Me Talk Pretty One Day."

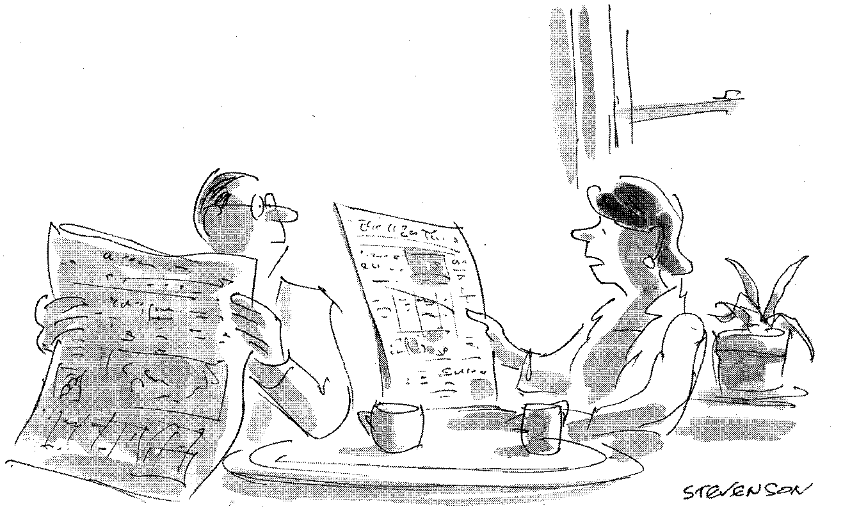
Jonathan Franzen ("Caught," p. 104) has published a new book of essays, "How to Be Alone." His novel "The Corrections" is out in paperback.

Roger Angell (Verse, p. 166) is a fiction editor at the magazine. His books include "A Pitcher's Story: Innings with David Cone" and, most recently, "Game Time: A Baseball Companion."

Jhumpa Lahiri ("Gogol," p. 170) is the author of "Interpreter of Maladies," a collection of short stories. Her novel "The Namesake" will be published in the fall.

Cynthia Ozick (A Critic at Large, p. 188) is completing a novel, "Lights and Watchtowers."

Spencer Reece (Poem, p. 202) will publish his first collection of poems next year. ♦



"I wish Donald Rumsfeld had a hobby."

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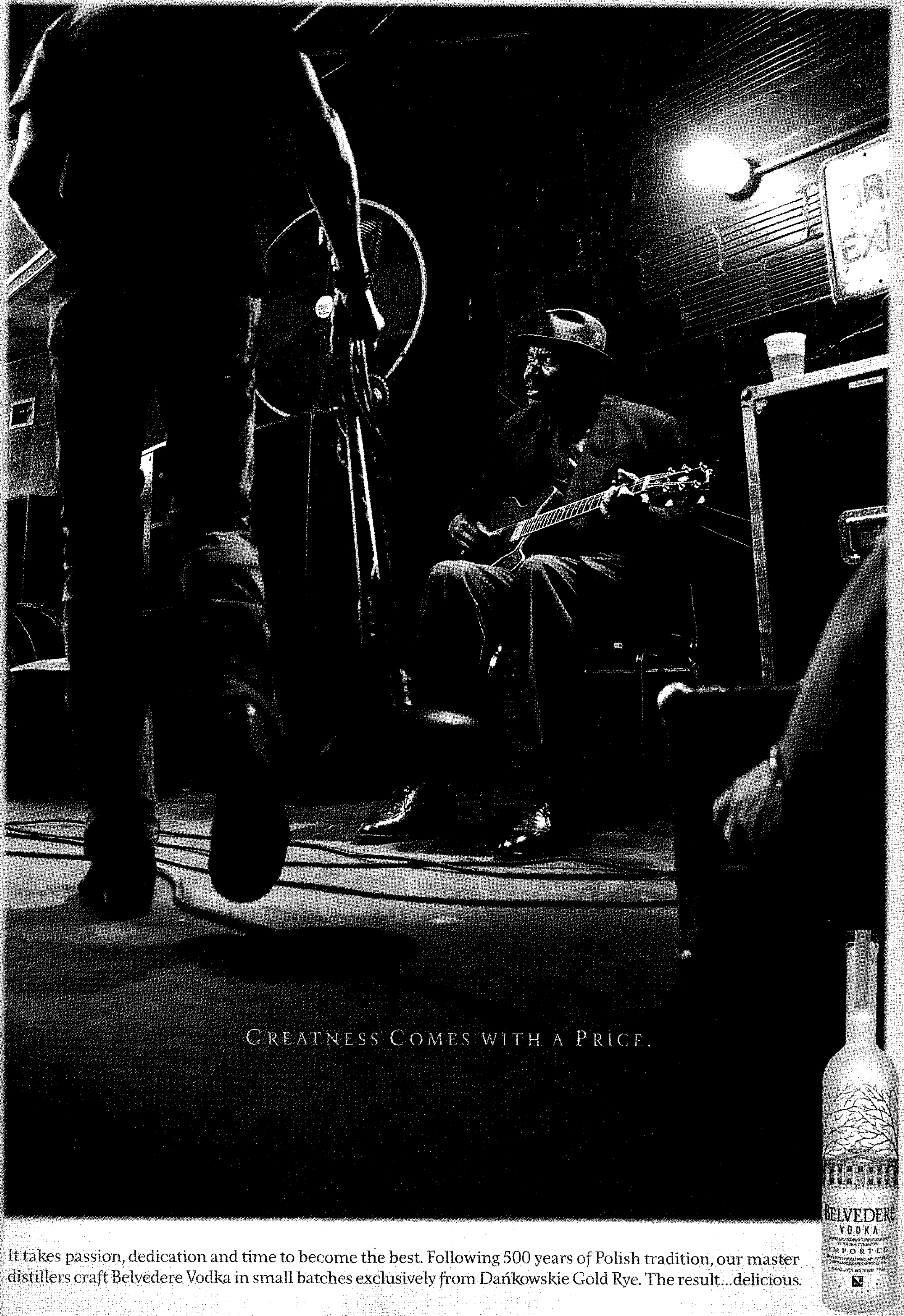
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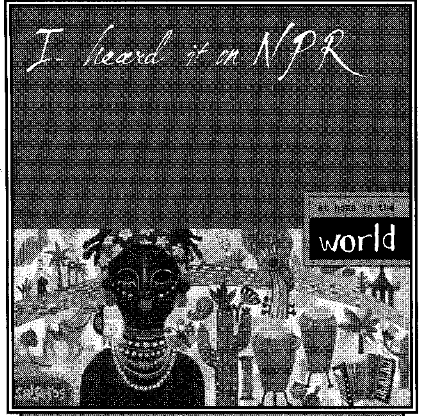

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CHASING FOX

Ken Auletta, in his piece on Fox News and Roger Ailes ("Vox Fox," May 26th), lets stand unchallenged an insinuation by Ailes that Dan Rather and CBS News allowed the Iraqis to edit the tape of Rather's exclusive interview with Saddam Hussein in February. As has been the case for every television news organization that has interviewed Saddam, Iraqi cameras recorded the interview, but CBS News made sure that the Iraqis turned over all of it. The interview was then edited by Rather and his producers.

Andrew Heyward
President, CBS News
New York City

Auletta might have looked more at the role profit considerations have played in the media's swing to strident, ratings-focussed news. Ailes is right: journalists have an institutional duty to serve as watchdogs of government and to provide viewers with the most unbiased data possible. Yet the race to the bottom in American journalism (of which Fox News is both a symptom and a cause) suggests that public responsibilities are increasingly at odds with private imperatives. We may have reached a point where the only way to be sure there is a news source that fulfills that duty is to rely on public funding. The for-profit news sources would be welcome to continue to compete for revenue as the "reality" entertainment shows they are.

Timothy E. Pavlis
Brookline, Mass.

GILDED YOUTH

By his own reckoning, the octogenarian Roger Angell is a few years my junior. But his exquisite "Romance" is an uncanny template of our common experiences growing up in New York in the late twenties and thirties (May 26th). We were both students at Lincoln School, though he must have been bracketed by my younger brother Robert and still younger sister Joan. Lincoln School was created as a laboratory for Columbia University's Teachers College to test the theories of its faculty member John Dewey. This radical experiment in progressive education was financed by the Rockefellers, who enrolled at least four of their progeny—Nelson, David, Laurance, and Winthrop. Lincoln kids were an audacious mix of scions of well-heeled families—many of us chauffeur-driven from the gilded West Side ghetto—alongside those from the intellectual and artistic communities. The school was situated on Morningside Park and 123rd Street, just two blocks from Harlem's main artery, 125th Street. But, in accordance with the era's generally accepted social compartmentalization and segregation, I don't recall anyone questioning the fact that none of the Lincoln School students or faculty were black.

Henry Morgenthau III
Cambridge, Mass.

A JUDICIAL SURRENDER

Jeffrey Toobin's piece on judicial nominations touched on a fundamental shift in power among the three branches of government ("Advice and Dissent," May 26th). The conservative position, that the judicial function is all but automatic, with judges merely applying the law, is increasingly true. Judicial discretion, once the heart of our system, was handed to federal prosecutors when Congress passed, and the Supreme Court upheld, Reagan's sentencing guidelines. What better illustrates Cass Sunstein's description to Toobin of a new right-wing activism than a Court that sustains the stripping of its own power?

Steven R. Shanin
Highland Park, Ill.

CORRECTION: A reference to President William Henry Harrison in "Advice and Dissent" should have been to his grandson President Benjamin Harrison.

•

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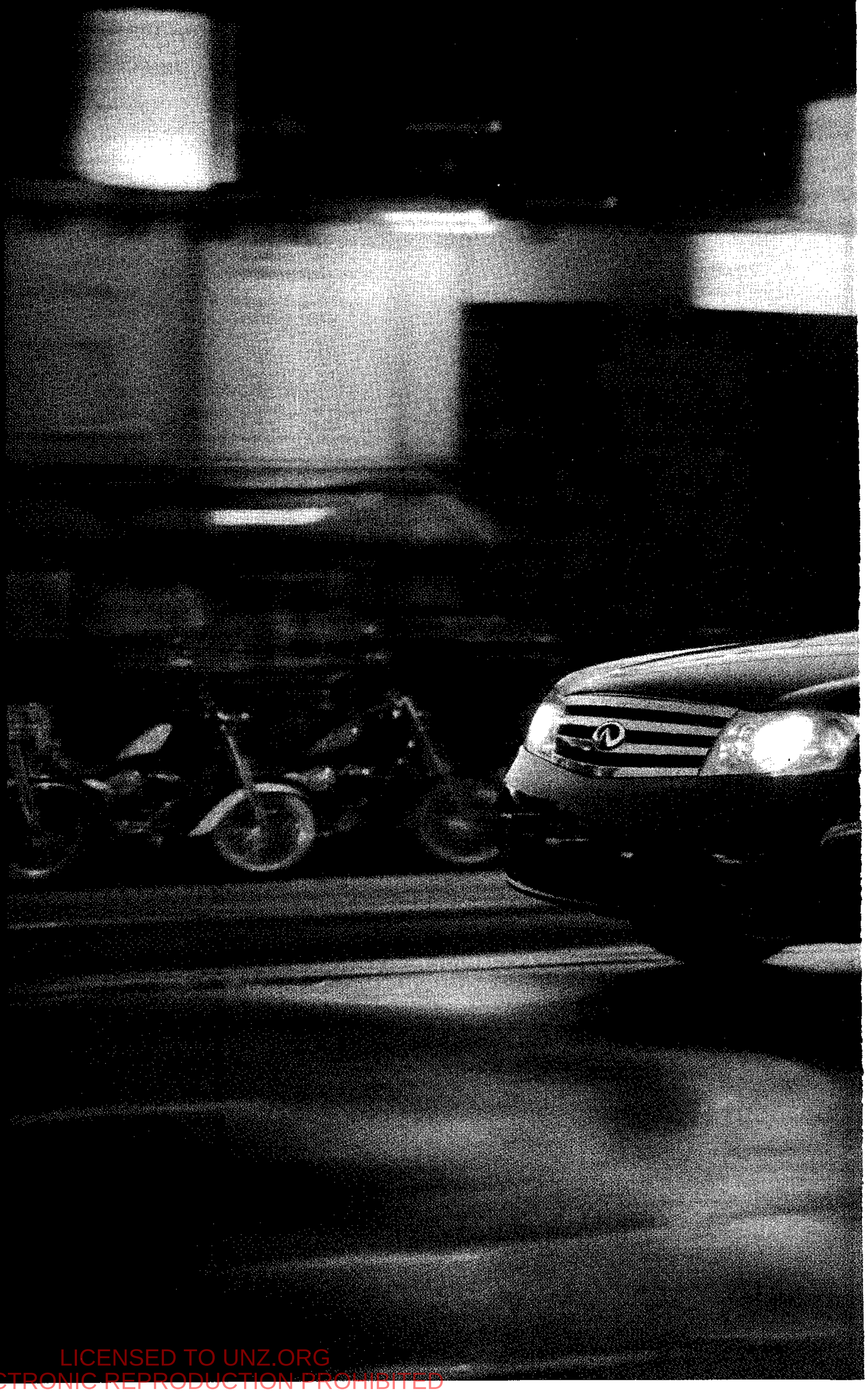

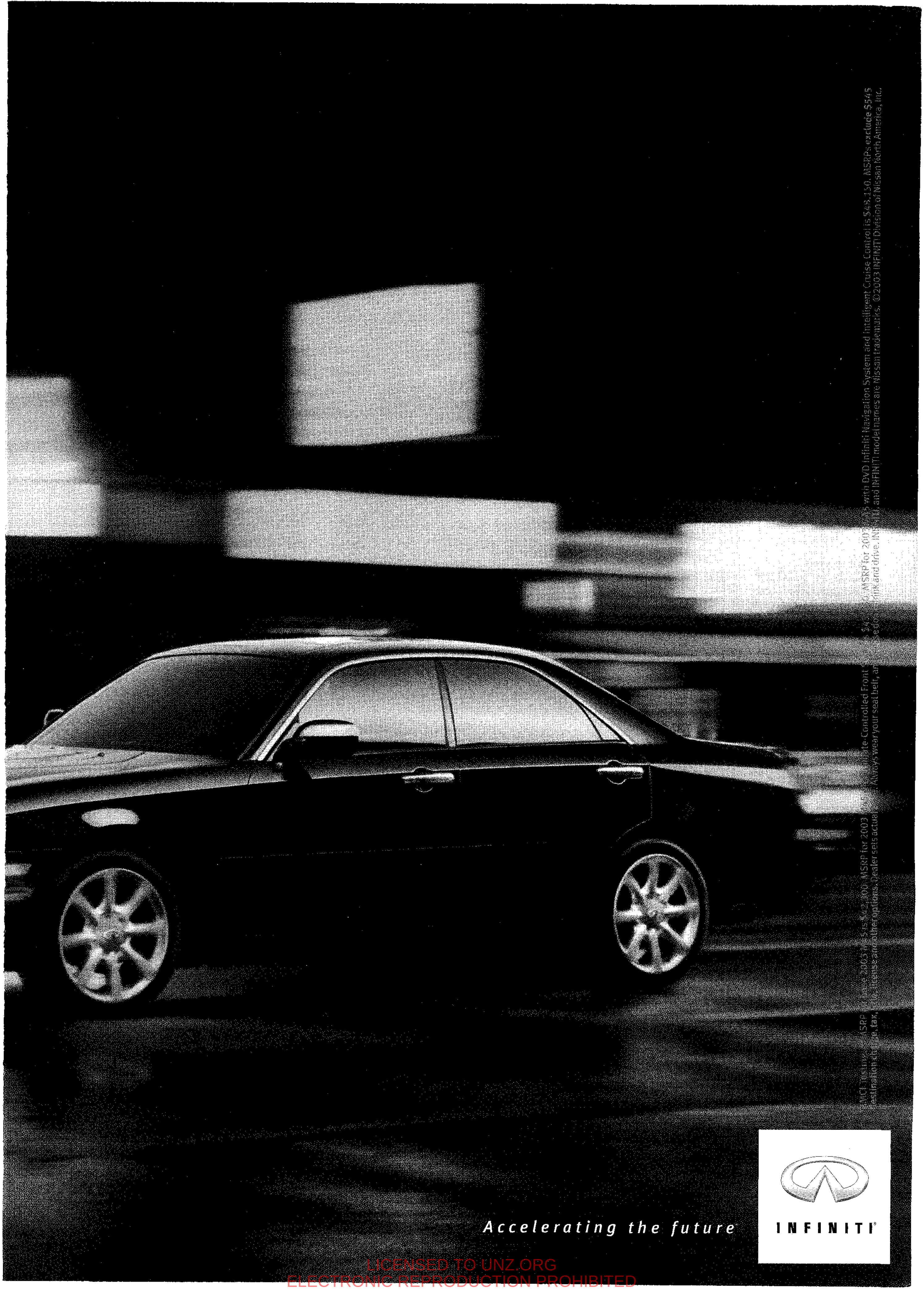

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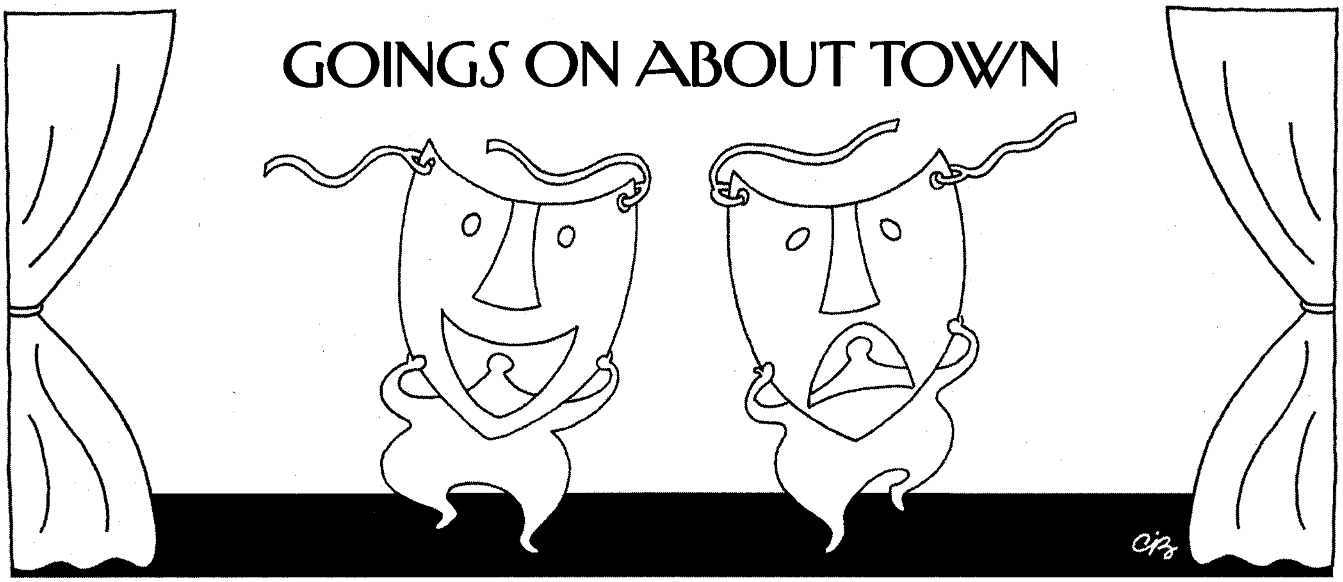

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BAD DATES
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THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
A 1911 drama by D. H. Lawrence, about a miner and his bride, receives a revival by the Mint Theatre Company. Directed by Martin L. Platt. In previews. Opens June 15 at 7. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

EIGHT DAYS (BACKWARDS)
The Vineyard Theatre concludes its season with a new play by Jeremy Dobrish, directed by Mark Brokaw, about thirteen city dwellers who contrive to turn time's arrow in the opposite direction and recoup missed opportunities. With Bill Buell, Barbara Garrick, and Josh Radnor. In previews. Opens June 16 at 8. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

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Ten short plays make their début in two programs at Chashama, including "Your Call Is Important," by Craig Lucas (about road rage), "Climate," by Joe Pintauro (about a trophy wife), and "Soooo Sad," by Ty Adams, in which two Park Avenue women on vacation in the Hamptons relive the previous night's party. Previews begin June 12. Program A opens June 15 at 3; program B opens June 15 at 5. Through June 29. (135 W. 42nd St. 212-868-4444.)

FLOW
As part of Danny Hoch's fourth annual downtown hip-hop festival, Will Power has written and stars in a new play that carries the griot tradition into the present day. Previews begin June 12. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. Other festival events occur at New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. Please call 212-477-5288 for schedule and venue information.)

GHOSTS
Ingmar Bergman directs the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden in a production of Ibsen's play, with Pernilla August as Mrs. Alving. June 10-14 at 7:30. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

HEAVEN IS LATE
A new drama by an Iraqi playwright investigates the loss of identity suffered by people who are removed from their homes by war or upheaval. Adapted and directed by Eric McAfee, a photojournalist and playwright, who found the play in Baghdad in 1999. One night only, June 14 at 10:30. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery. 212-614-0505.)

INTRIGUE WITH FAYE
Benjamin Bratt and Julianna Margulies star in an M.C.C. Theatre production of a new play by Kate Robin (a writer and producer for "Six Feet Under"), in which a man and a woman videotape each other's every move. Jim Simpson directs. In previews. Opens June 11 at 7. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI
Mary Zimmerman ("Metamorphoses") brings her 1993 play about the imagination of Da Vinci back to Second Stage, in a production that combines dance, theatre, music, and acrobatics. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

PITCHFORK DISNEY
Stiff Upper Lip, a new British theatre company, brings a dark comedy from the London Fringe to New York, in which a night-club entertainer preys upon two chocolate-addicted twins. With an all-British cast of New York-based actors. Kevin Kittle directs. Opens June 18 at 8. (Greenwich Street, 547 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

TEN STORIES: A HUMBLE OFFERING
TO THE MANHATTAN SKYLINE
Skyline Cooperative Arts Performance Endeavor presents a collection of ten-minute plays about the city, written by Jonathan Ames, Tom Beller, Rose Gowan, Molly Townsend, and Eugene Mirman, among others. The show takes place in a park in Dumbo, on a set that resembles the top few feet of a Brooklyn town house. June 12-15 only, at 7:30. (Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, Dumbo, Brooklyn. 212-352-3101.)

OPENED RECENTLY

A BAD FRIEND
In a new play by Jules Feiffer, set during the McCarthy era, members of a Brooklyn family suffer for their Communist Party ties. Larry Bryggman, David Harbour, and Mark Feuerstein lead the cast. Directed by Jerry Zaks. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

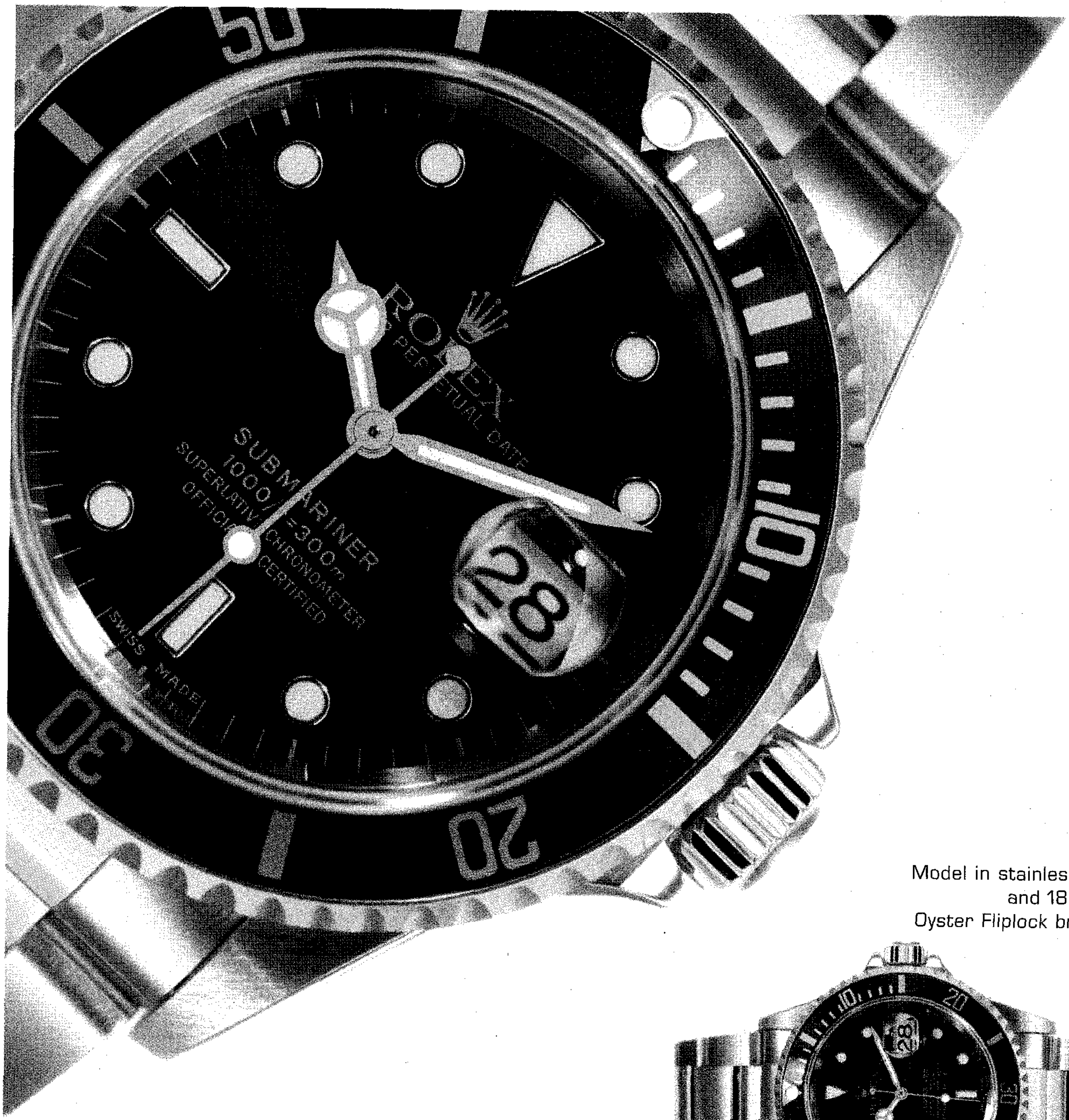
DOOR WIDE OPEN
"Your first thought is your best thought," Jack Kerouac said. But in a new play that chronicles her love affair with the Beat icon in the late fifties, based on her recent book of their correspondence, Joyce Johnson certainly questions her first thoughts on Kerouac. Despite an occasionally dragging narrative, the play is energized by the tension between the young and the old Johnson (Adira Amram and Amy Wright, respectively), both of whom love their hero (played by John Ventimiglia)—one uncritically, one critically—and by sparks of attraction between the lovers. Directed by Tony Torn. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery. 212-614-0505. Closes June 22.)

A GLANCE AT NEW YORK
For the first time since the Civil War, Benjamin A. Baker's 1848 melodrama returns to the stage, in an Axis Company production. Baker's play was the first to feature Mose the Fireman, a tough but decent character who beats up some people and saves others and was so popular that he spawned a series of "Mosaic" plays. Directed by Randy Sharp. (1 Sheridan Sq., at Seventh Ave. 212-807-9300.)

GRASMERE
Kristina Leach's play about William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the two women who inspired them plays at Cherry Lane Studio for ten days only. Directed by Joseph Arnold. (38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-279-4200. Through June 15.)

I AM MY OWN WIFE
The play is—as its title broadcasts—the story of a narcissist. Nothing, however, can prepare you for its hero, Lothar Berfelde, a transvestite and collector who, living for decades in East Berlin as "Charlotte von Mahlsdorf," survived first the Nazis, then the Stasi. There is no makeup, no feminine exaggeration, no camp, no sense of defiance or despair in her presentation of self. At first glance, she could almost be a nun. As Jefferson Mays brilliantly embodies her, she is a meticulous, modest soul. What is sensational about her is her normality. The playwright, Doug Wright ("Quills"), conceives the evening as a sort of detective story to uncover the facts of Charlotte's life, and Mays plays all the characters with thrilling credibility. Moisés Kaufman's strong direction makes the transitions both clear and compelling. (6/9/03) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

LAST DANCE
You may not want to like a play about a famous writer who retires to a villa in the South of France and casts off her strapping younger lover, but the playwright, Marsha Norman, wins you over. On a staid, pretty set that evokes the Britcom "As Time Goes By," funny and bitter truths emerge with surprising sting, mostly from the mouth of Randall (David Rasche), a courtly but jaundiced Southerner



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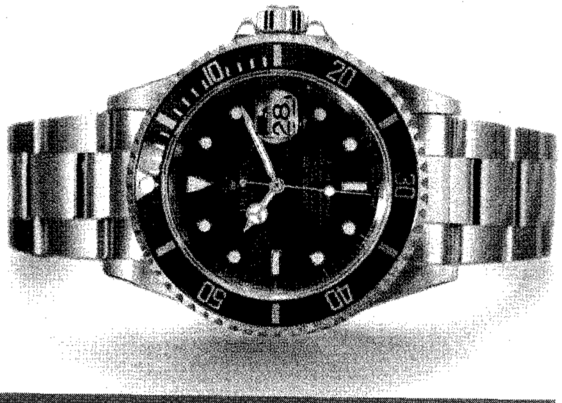

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New York

who wants to wrest Charlotte, the writer, from her Adonis, Cab (the beautiful Lorenzo Pisoni), whom he nicknames "Cabernet" and "Cabana. As in boy." But his jealousy is unnecessary; Charlotte (JoBeth Williams) has already decided to hand Cab off to her goddaughter, Georgeanne (Heather Goldenhersh), because she's "tired" of love. Goldenhersh uses a juleppy Southern accent and has a dewy ingenuousness that recalls the young Shirley MacLaine. She's powerful in her artlessness, sexy because she's not trying to be. Directed by Lynne Meadow. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT
Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece has been superbly revived at the Plymouth, bringing O'Neill's own spectral, heartbroken family—"the four haunted Tyrones," he called them—to the stage. Vanessa Redgrave and Brian Dennehy play Mary and James Tyrone, and Philip Seymour Hoffman and Robert Sean Leonard are their sons, Jamie and Edmund. Hoffman's toxic sorrow, in his drunken confession of envy of his brother, kicks the play onto a completely new emotional level, and this and Mary's final aria pack an unforgettable wallop. Directed by Robert Falls. (5/19/03) (236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

"MASTER HAROLD" . . . AND THE BOYS
The "boys" of Athol Fugard's play, set in the nineteen-fifties, are two adult black South Africans, Willie (Michael Boatman) and Sam (Danny Glover), who work at the St. Georges Park Tea Room and spend much of their time bantering with a seventeen-year-old whippersnapper, Hal (Christopher Denham)—or Hally, as they call him—who is the son of the tearoom's owners. What begins as a gentle dance of teasing and reminiscence between three people who are clearly family turns into a tense standoff, as a series of phone calls introduce the problem of Hally's father—a crippled, abusive drunk. When Hally begins to bad-mouth his father, Sam tells him to watch his tone, and a war begins in which pain, fury, love, and hate ricochet between the two of them. Grieving and wanting to inflict grief in return, Hally uses race as a weapon to hurt Sam and hurts himself, too. Directed by Lonny Price. (6/9/03) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PERSIANS
Aeschylus' 470 B.C. play about the Persian Wars (he was a vet) has been revived by Tony Randall's National Actors Theatre in an adaptation by Ellen McLaughlin, which stars Len Cariou and Roberta Maxwell. Ethan McSweeny directs. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 212-239-6200.)

SAVANNAH BAY
Kathleen Chalfant and Marin Ireland star in a Classic Stage production of Marguerite Duras's drama about the rapprochement between an aged *vedette* and her granddaughter. Directed by Les Waters, with a new translation by Barbara Bray. (136 E. 13th St. 212-677-4210, ext. 13.)

TROJAN WOMEN: A LOVE STORY
In Charles Mee's mordant update of the plight of the grieving widows of Troy, scenes from recent conflicts—air raids, terrorist attacks, the battle of the sexes—mingle with the aftermath of the Greek-Trojan rout, interspersed with MTV-style dances in a classics-to-moderns channel surf. Now, as then, Mee's play reiterates, women suffer long after soldiers decamp. Indeed, as the female chorus chants: "What would be the point of being born a woman if you didn't know one day the world would break your heart?" Tragic women contrast with humorously indifferent men, and Elliott Kennerson's timing as Talthybius is priceless. The lines "These days, war is so unsparing," delivered with David Spade deadpan, and "I understand your feelings," when he orders Hecuba to deliver her daughter to be slaughtered, make a comedy of mercilessness. A Double Helix Theatre Company production, directed by Ellen Beckerman. (Phil Bosakowski Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-352-3101. Closes June 21.)

ZANNA, DON'T!
All the students at Heartsville High are gay, so calamity ensues when the football quarterback and the female lead in the school play (about heterosexuals in the military) notice that they have feelings for each other. Jared Zeus, as the clumsy quarterback, and Anika Larsen, as a white soul-singing lesbian, stand out in the youthful, talented cast. Directed and choreographed by Devanand Janki. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

BARBRA'S WEDDING
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes June 18.)

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

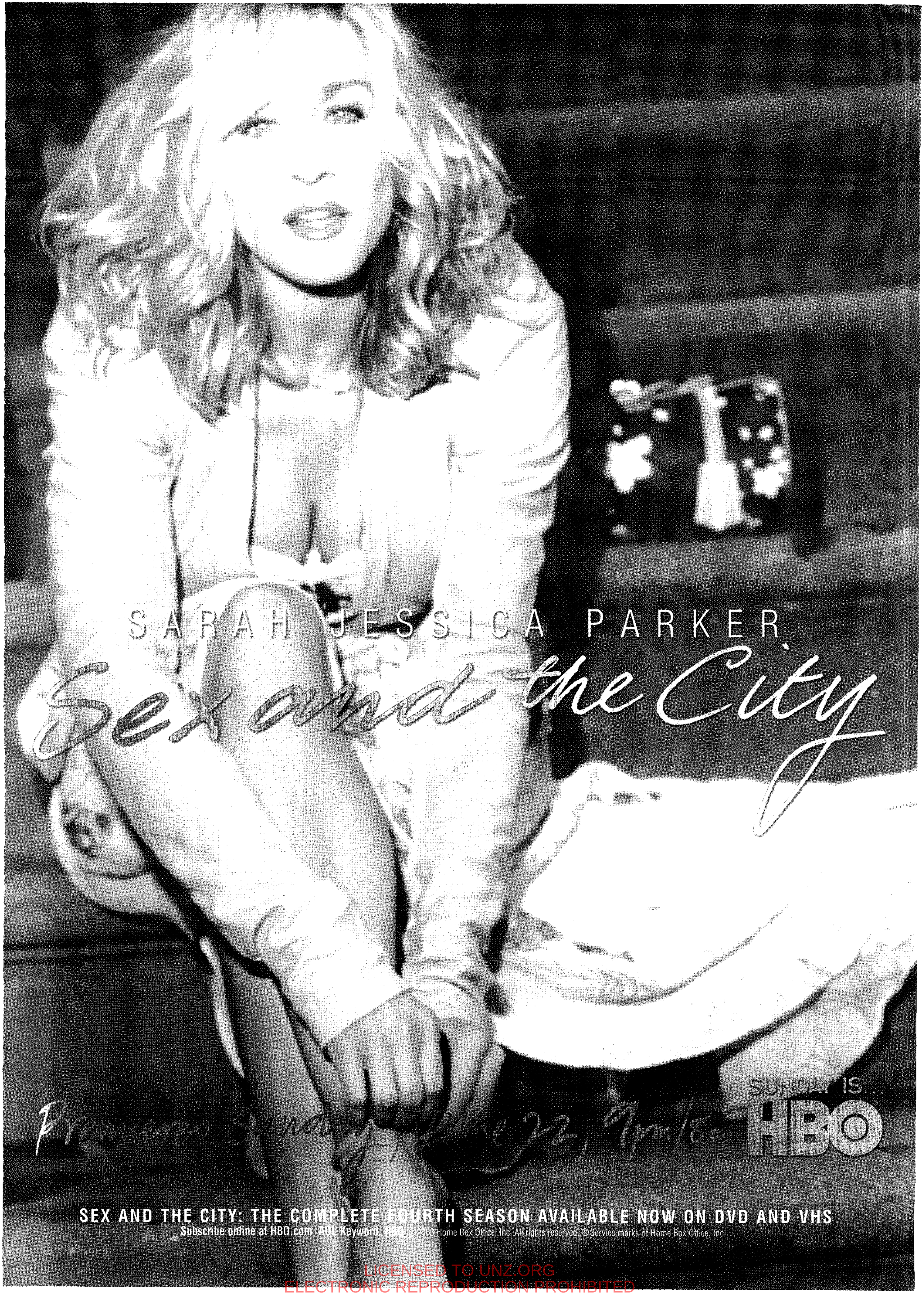
LA BOHÈME
Broadway, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

SOUL OF THE GAME *Baseball produces relics as readily as statistics, and the refreshing art in the American Folk Art Museum's "The Perfect Game: America Looks at Baseball" show (which opens June 17, at the museum's headquarters on 45 W. 53rd St.) includes penny-arcade sluggers, player portraits embroidered by a game-deprived convict from sock and shoelace threads, several balls decorated with India ink by a multitalented umpire, frieze work from the original Yankee Stadium, a mysterious Mets logo fashioned by a Cuna Indian seamstress in Panama, an enamel-on-tin image of Jackie Robinson stealing home, and photographs of the shining but evanescent Bosox patterns mowed onto the Fenway Park outfield grass by groundskeeper David R. Mellor, a Cézanne of this new genre. Cooperstown, take note.—Roger Angell*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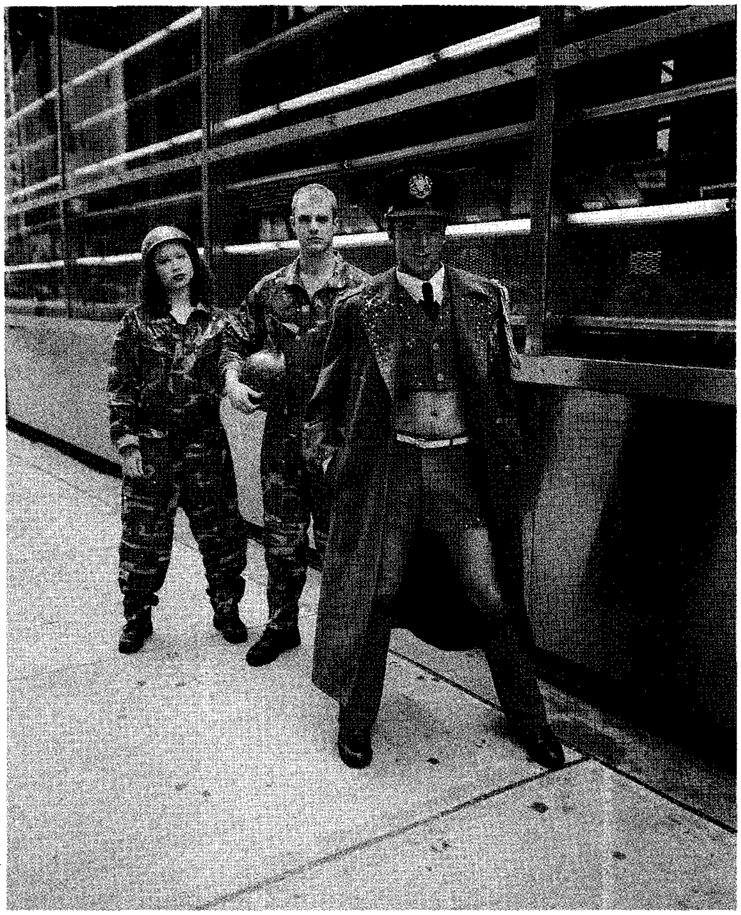

Shelley Thomas, Jared Zeus, and Jai Rodriguez in the musical "Zanna, Don't!"

LISA KERESZI

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM
Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.
ENCHANTED APRIL
Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
THE EXONERATED
45 Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
GOLDA'S BALCONY
Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.
GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
HABITAT
Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 212-206-1515. (Closes June 22.)
HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.
HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
HUMBLE BOY
Manhattan Theatre Club, City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.
KIKI AND HERB: COUP DE THÉÂTRE
Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-239-6200.
THE LAST SUNDAY IN JUNE
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.
LIFE (X) 3
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
THE LOOK OF LOVE
Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. (Closes June 15.)
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.
MAN OF LA MANCHA
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
MONDO DRAMA
Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.
MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.
NINE
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.
PEG O' MY HEART
Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
THE PLAY WHAT I WROTE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
RAIN DANCE
Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. (Closes June 29.)
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.
SALOME
Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes June 14.)
SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.
TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.
TEA AT FIVE
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.
THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.
TRUMBO
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. (Mondays only.)
URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.
WRITER'S BLOCK
Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.
A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD
Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Several Jerome Robbins ballets return to City Ballet after a longish absence, including the "West Side Story Suite" and "The Cage," an allegorical ballet set to Stravinsky. ♦ June 11 at 8 (an all-Balanchine program): "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " and "Western Symphony." ♦ June 12 at 8: "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Carousel (A Dance)," "Piano Pieces," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ June 13 at 8: "Reliquary," "The Cage," "Valse-Fantaisie," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ June 14 at 2: "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Reliquary," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " and "Glass Pieces." ♦ June 14 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Liturgy," "Piano Pieces," and "Western Symphony." ♦ June 15 at 3: "Who Cares?," "Robert Schumann's 'Davidsbündlertänze,' " and "Glass Pieces." ♦ June 17 at 7:30 (an all-Robbins program): "Glass Pieces," "Piano Pieces," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ June 18 at 8: "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet," "Thou Swell," and "West Side Story Suite." June 19 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "The Cage," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Western Symphony." ♦ June 20 at 8: "Ballade," "Thou Swell," and "Western Symphony." June 21 at 2: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "The Cage," "Valse-Fantaisie," and "West Side Story Suite." June 21 at 8: "Reliquary," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Thou Swell," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ June 22 at 3: "Carousel (A Dance)," "Tarantella," "Piano Pieces," and "West Side Story Suite." ♦ June 24 at 7:30: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 29.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Diana Vishneva, visiting from the Kirov, makes her A.B.T. début on the evening of the 11th, dancing Juliet to Vladimir Malakhov's Romeo; on the evening of the 23rd, Alessandra Ferri and Ethan Steifel dance the parts of Titania and Oberon in Frederick Ashton's "The Dream," which had its première last season. ♦ June 11 at 2 and 8: "Romeo and Juliet." ♦ June 12-13 and June 16 at 8 and June 14 at 2 and 8: "Don Quixote." ♦ June 17 and June 19-20 at 8 and June 18 at 2 and 8: "Swan Lake." ♦ June 23 at 8: "Artemis," "The Leaves Are Fading" pas de deux, "Don Quixote" pas de deux, and "The Dream." ♦ June 24 at 8: "Artemis," "The Leaves Are Fading" pas de deux, "Grand Pas Classique," and "The Dream." (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through June 28.)

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET
This small company with deep pockets began in Aspen and now also has a regular season in Santa Fe. The dual mountain settings and the company's athletic, classically trained dancers have enticed internationally known choreographers to visit and create new work. The ballet performs four contrasting dances in its New York début: Nicolo Fonte's complexly partnered "Vertical Dream"; a sensual duet by Dwight Rhoden set to Schubert's "Ave Maria"; Dominique Dumais's conceptual piece "Sans Detour," set to music by Philip Glass, Bach, and others; and a new work by the Momix choreographer Moses Pendleton, "Noir Blanc." Pendleton works his usual hallucinogenic illusions, engineering seemingly impossible feats with the help of half-white, half-black unitards, black light, and only one pointe shoe per dancer. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. June 17 at 7:30, June 18-20 at 8, and June 21 at 2 and 8.)

FLAMENCO VIVO CARLOTA SANTANA
The company celebrates its twentieth anniversary with a program of new and repertory work. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. June 11-13 at 8, June 14 at 2 and 8, and June 15 at 2 and 7:30.)

LIONEL HOCHE / MEME BANJO
Do we need another "Rite of Spring"? This trendy French choreographer doesn't make a good case for it. Amid neon lamps that hang to the floor, dancers writhe in clumps to Stravinsky's score, striving for a slick new primitivism. Things get interesting when two lynxlike men go on the prowl, but as women are repeatedly thrown about and dragged, the pseudo-

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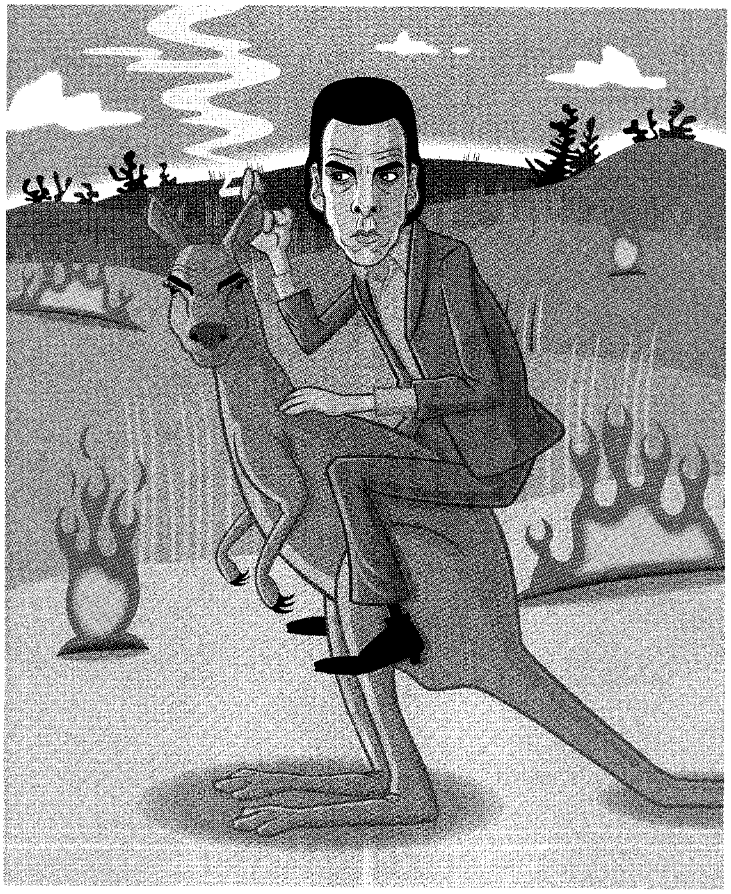
eroticism takes on a misogynist tone. In a second piece, "Verska," swinging seventies costumes and plush couches raise hopes of social satire, but the dance turns out to be affectedly impersonal. The dancers sleepwalk, congealed in a soundscore of repetitive, ambient noise. A Danspace production in the "Global Exchange" series. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. June 12-15 at 8:30.)

"OFFERING"

Eiko & Koma, the New York-based Japanese movement artists, perform a dance in the graveyard at St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, along noisy Second Avenue. A ritual of mourning and renewal, "Offering" was first performed in Manhattan last July near Ground Zero and has travelled to many locations. The audience can come and go, and even attention-deficient passersby will be grabbed by the set, a curious structure of wood and dirt that looks like it could be a house, a funeral pyre, or a Dumpster. The cumulative experience of Eiko and Koma's slender bodies slowly shifting on and around the mound, causing the dirt to rumble as it falls, makes an indelible memory. (Second Ave. at 10th St. No tickets necessary. June 18-22 at 8:30.)

"THE NEW YORK RAMAYANA"

The ancient Hindu epic informs dance not only in India and in the Hindu culture of Bali but also in the Buddhist culture of Burma and the Islamic culture of the southern Philippines. In a Lotus Fine Arts production, three local choreographers and their troupes—Bani Ray, U Win Maung, and Potri Ranka Manis—present several of those variations, with their attendant music and ornate costumes, in a kind of relay race. Dancers of one style pass the narrative thread to dancers of another style, celebrating similarity in difference. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-627-1076. June 14 at 8.)



TRICKY NICK *Though the Australian singer-songwriter Nick Cave has a depressing streak a mile wide—his often morbid lyrics are sung in a brooding baritone—he is also capable of black humor, as on his most recent release, "Nocturama," which includes a hilariously over-the-top fifteen-minute closer, "Babe, I'm on Fire."*

MICHAEL WELDON

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW

The annual summer dance festival in Massachusetts has just been declared a National Landmark, and a landmark gala kicks off the 2003 season with performances by Wayne Eagling, Stephen Petronio, and the Martha Graham Dance Company, returning to the Pillow after a nine-year absence. The regular season begins the following week with a visit from the Twyla Tharp Dance Company, in which a new troupe of dancers performs the choreographer's works "Westerly Round," "Surfer at the River Styx," "The Fugue," and "Known by Heart Duet." (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. June 18-20 at 8, June 21 at 2 and 8, and June 22 at 2.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!

A rare appearance by the legendary English singer-songwriter **Joan Armatrading**, who is touring in support of "Lover's Speak," her first U.S. release in eight years, kicks off this mostly free concert series on June 12 at 8. The following night, the **Spanish Harlem Orchestra** fills the air with its N.Y.C. salsa. The Cuban *charanga* violinist **Alfredo de la Fé** warms things up starting at 7:30. June 14 at 7:30: A visit from the West Coast rappers **Blackalicious.** June 20 at 7:30: The smoky-voiced **Rosanne Cash** and the Cape Breton fiddler **Natalie MacMaster.** June 21 at 7:30: The unmatched soul singer **Erykah Badu** gives a benefit show. June 22 at 6: The Irish roots rock of the **Sawdoctors.** (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45.)

VAN MORRISON / SOLOMON BURKE

The prickly Irish troubadour may have a well-deserved reputation for being an unpredictable performer, but anyone who's seen him at his best will admit that he's worth the gamble. This time around he's touring behind his latest album, "Down the Road." The opening act is the flamboyant and sublime sexagenarian soul singer Solomon Burke, whose 2002 comeback album, "Don't Give Up on Me," included a pair of Morrison covers. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. June 13 at 8.) ♦ Burke travels uptown for a show at the 92nd Street Y, on June 18 at 8. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE

The mostly free alfresco concerts begin June 14 at 7 with a sneak preview of Martin Scorsese's forthcoming documentary, "The Blues," and an appearance by **Chris Thomas King.** June 15 at 7: **Johnny Winter** and the **James Cotton Band.** June 22 at 3: The Brazilian vocalist **Daniela Mercury.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777.)

ANDRE THIERRY & ZYDECO MAGIC

A rare—for these parts, anyway—Saturday-night Louisiana-fuelled zydeco dance party. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. June 14 at 8.)

JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL

If last year's JVC Jazz Festival leaned too heavily on the pop side of things, this year's edition, which officially gets under way on June 15, makes amends nicely. Sure, Joe Cocker and India.Arie slip in (on June 25 and June 27, respectively, at Avery Fisher Hall), but any musical celebration that covers the range from Bix Beiderbecke to Ornette Coleman with pit stops along the way for Joe Wilder, Terence Blanchard, Ray Barretto, Ben Allison, and Chris Connor must be doing something right. With one or more acts of substance scheduled for each night, picking which shows to attend is a luxurious challenge. Highlights include a Bix Beiderbecke Centennial Celebration (June 19; Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St.), an all-star tribute to Peggy Lee (June 23; Carnegie Hall), Ornette Coleman's trio and Charlie Haden's American Dream project (June 25; Carnegie Hall), Chick Corea (June 26; Avery Fisher Hall), and Wayne Shorter (June 28; Carnegie Hall). All shows are at 8. See also Iridium, under Jazz and Standards. For more information, call 212-501-1390 or visit www.festivalproductions.net.

BEN HARPER / JACK JOHNSON

Harper, an earnest and independent-minded singer-songwriter, has secured his spot in the underground by playing his funky folk rock for some ten years now. Johnson, on the other hand, is a former professional surfer whose second album of soft summery rock in as many years, the recently released "On and On," débuted at the number-three spot on the charts. (Jones Beach Theatre. 212-307-7171. June 18 at 6:30.)

"COLOURS OF RITUAL"

Nearly a dozen musicians from Brazil, Morocco, Israel, and elsewhere provide a rhythmic soundtrack for an evening's investigation into the songs of the Jewish and African diasporas. The program, which also includes multimedia works and dancers, is presented by an organization called the International House of Trances. (Angel Orensanz Center for the Arts, 172 Norfolk St. 212-529-7194. June 19 at 8.)

"LOST JAZZ SHRINES"

The groundbreaking night club Café Society was a diva haven; it was there that Billie Holiday introduced "Strange Fruit." The up-and-coming singers **Carla Cook** and **René Marie** pay tribute to the venue's legendary vocalists. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. June 20 at 8.)

"LIVE FROM HOME"

The Fountains of Wayne, Jesse Malin, and Amy Correia offer a night of luminescent pop, urban neo-country, and literate songwriting. (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. June 20 at 7:30.)

DIXIE CHICKS

The top-selling country-music trio and recent poster girls for free speech answer their critics with a pair of shows. (Madison Square Garden. June 20-21 at 8.)

NORAH JONES

Thanks to a mesmerizing voice, fine songwriting skills, and great taste in cover material, the twenty-four-year-old singer and pianist recently walked off with an armload of Grammy Awards for her début album, "Come Away with Me." With the traditional bluegrass twang of **Gillian Welch.** (Beacon Theatre. June 23-25 at 8.)

NICK CAVE

The dark Aussie bard is backed by his longtime band, the Bad Seeds. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. June 24-25 at 7:30.)

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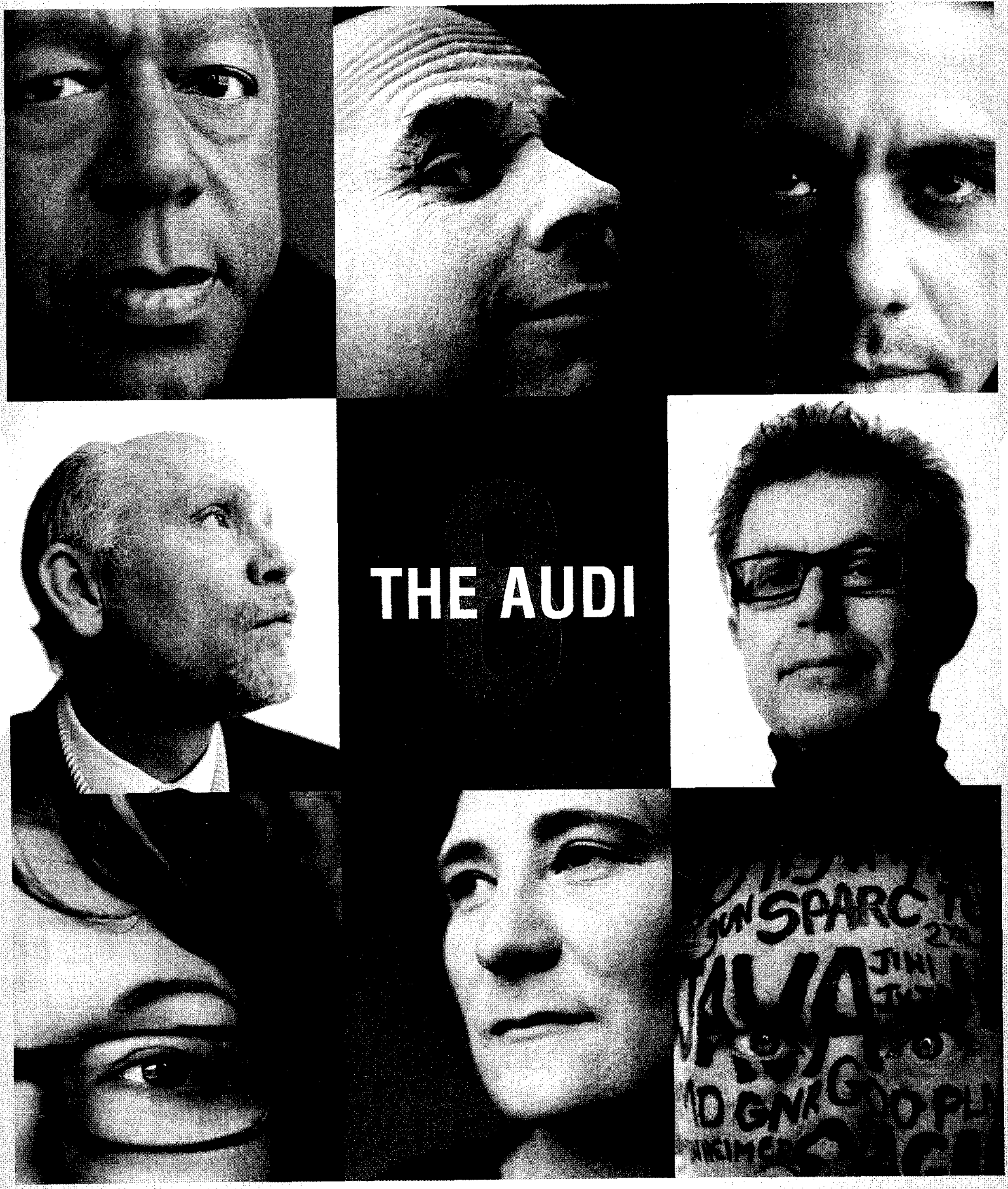

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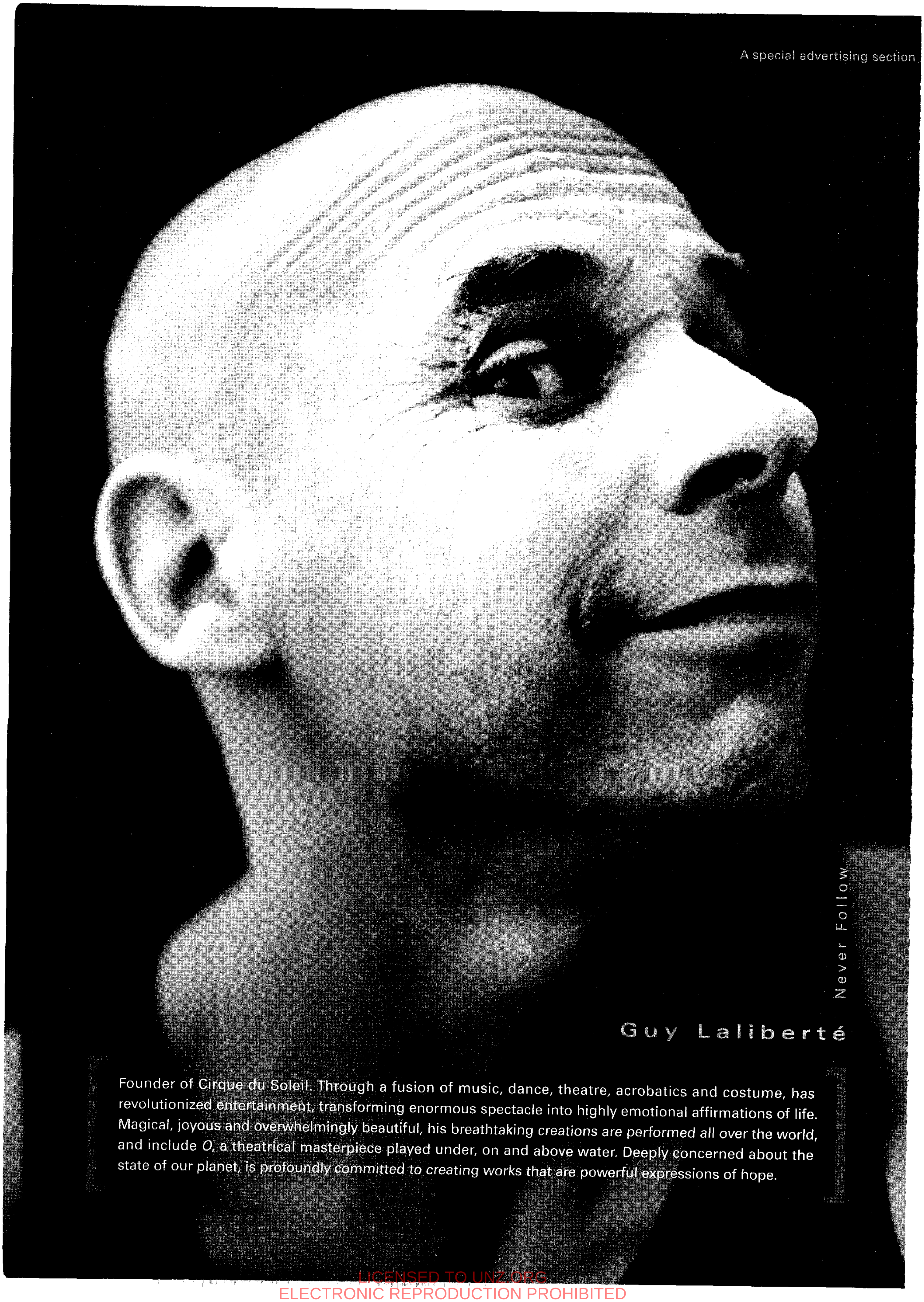

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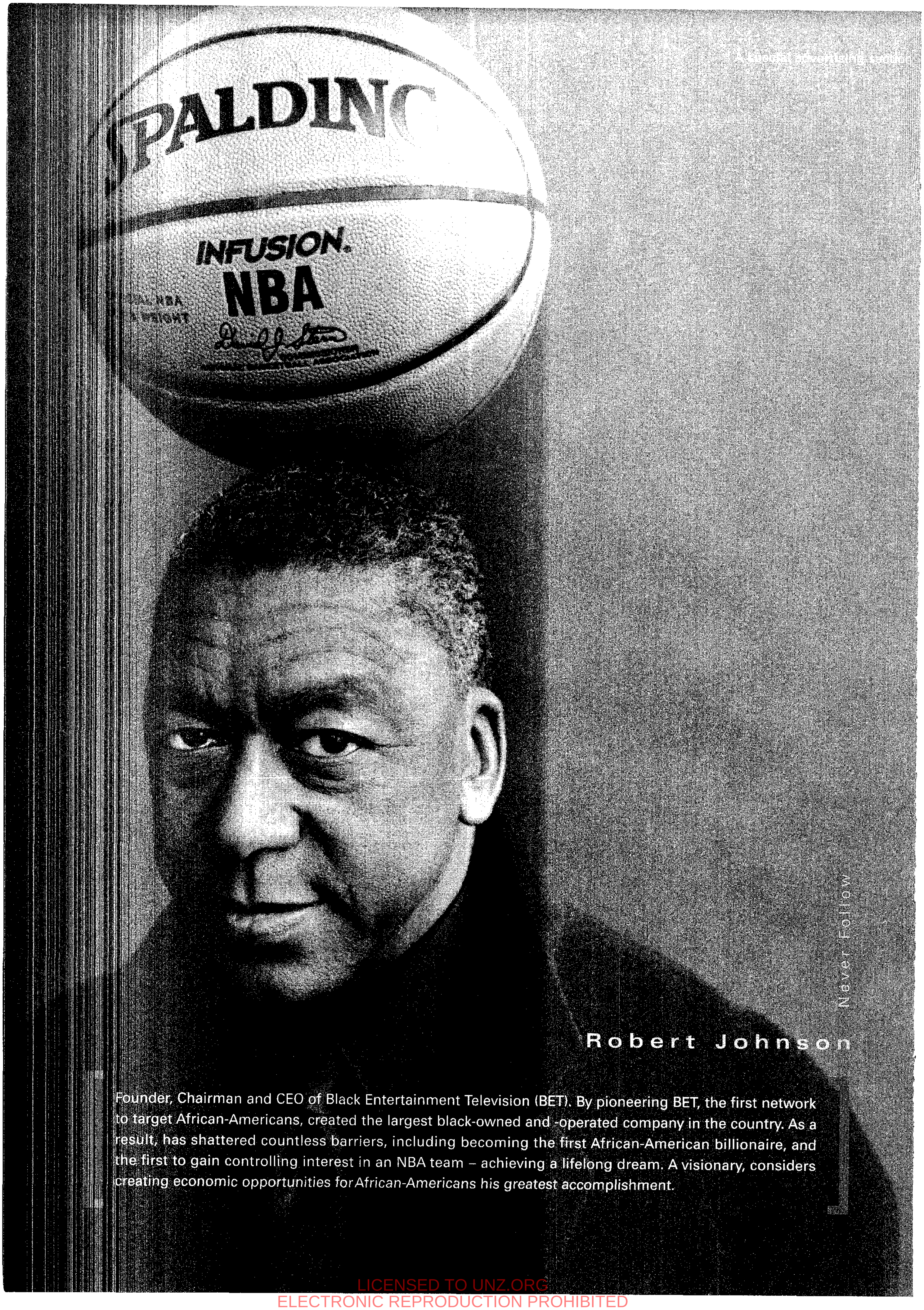
k.d. lang

Never Follow



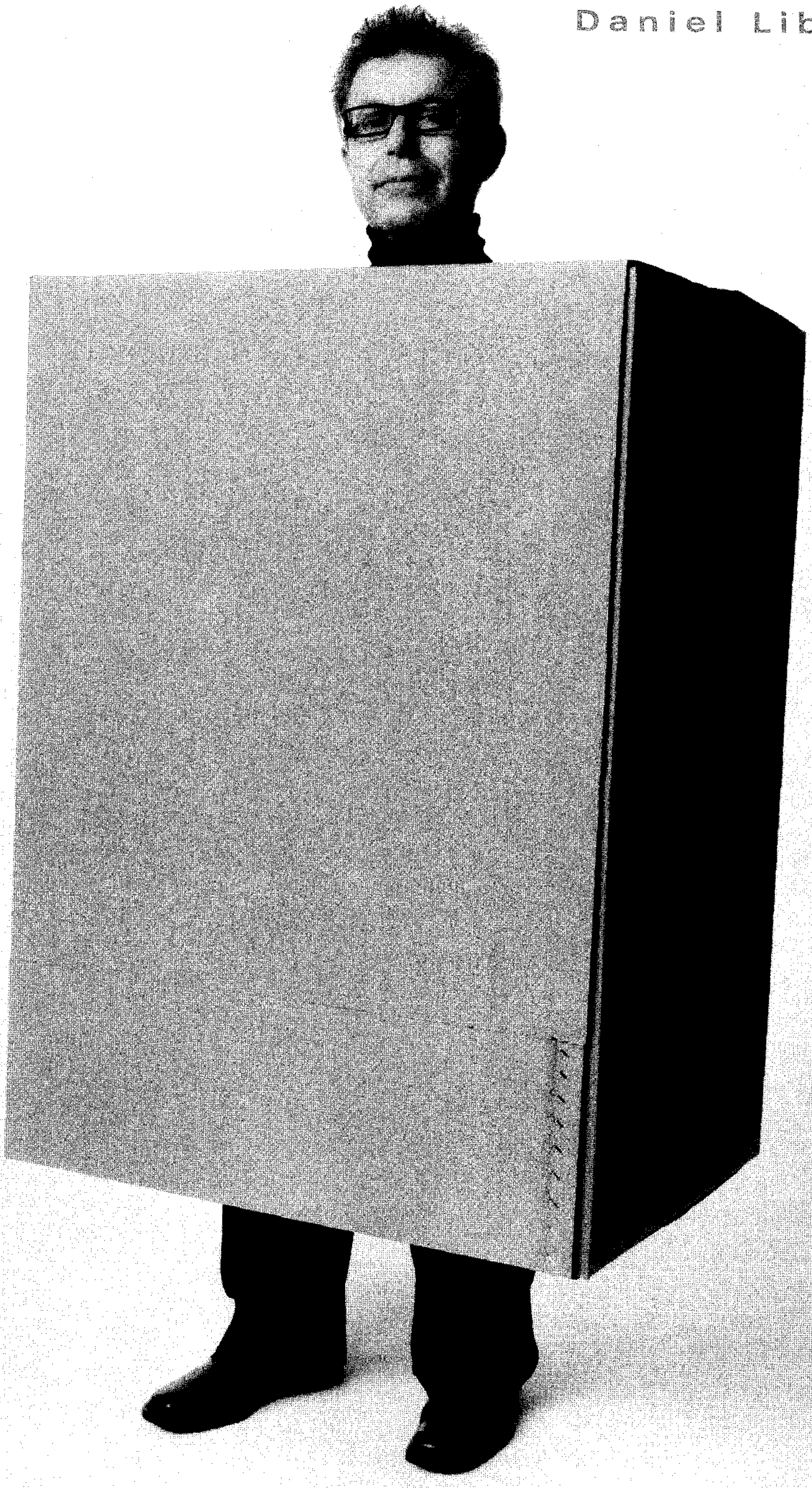
Robert Johnson

Founder, Chairman and CEO of Black Entertainment Television (BET). By pioneering BET, the first network to target African-Americans, created the largest black-owned and -operated company in the country. As a result, has shattered countless barriers, including becoming the first African-American billionaire, and the first to gain controlling interest in an NBA team – achieving a lifelong dream. A visionary, considers creating economic opportunities for African-Americans his greatest accomplishment.

[Considered an architect's architect, was recently awarded the commission of the century – the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site. Designer of some of the world's most provocative buildings, has virtually reinvented architecture, transforming sand and stone into spiritual structures that resonate profoundly with the heart. The first architect to be given the Hiroshima Art Prize for work that promotes peace, is relentless in his vision to create spaces that are positive responses to the brutalities that surround us all.]

Daniel Libeskind

Never Follow



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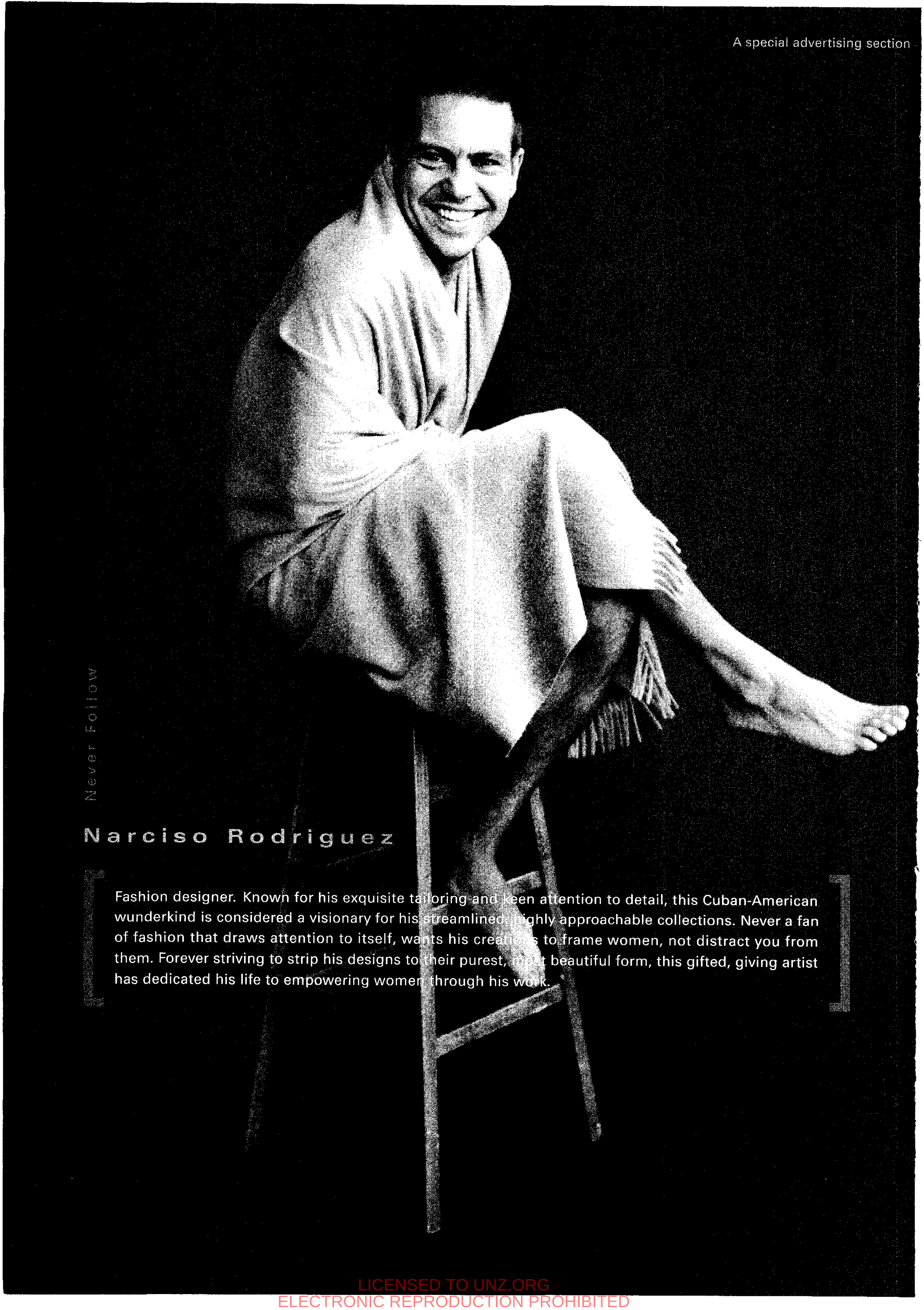
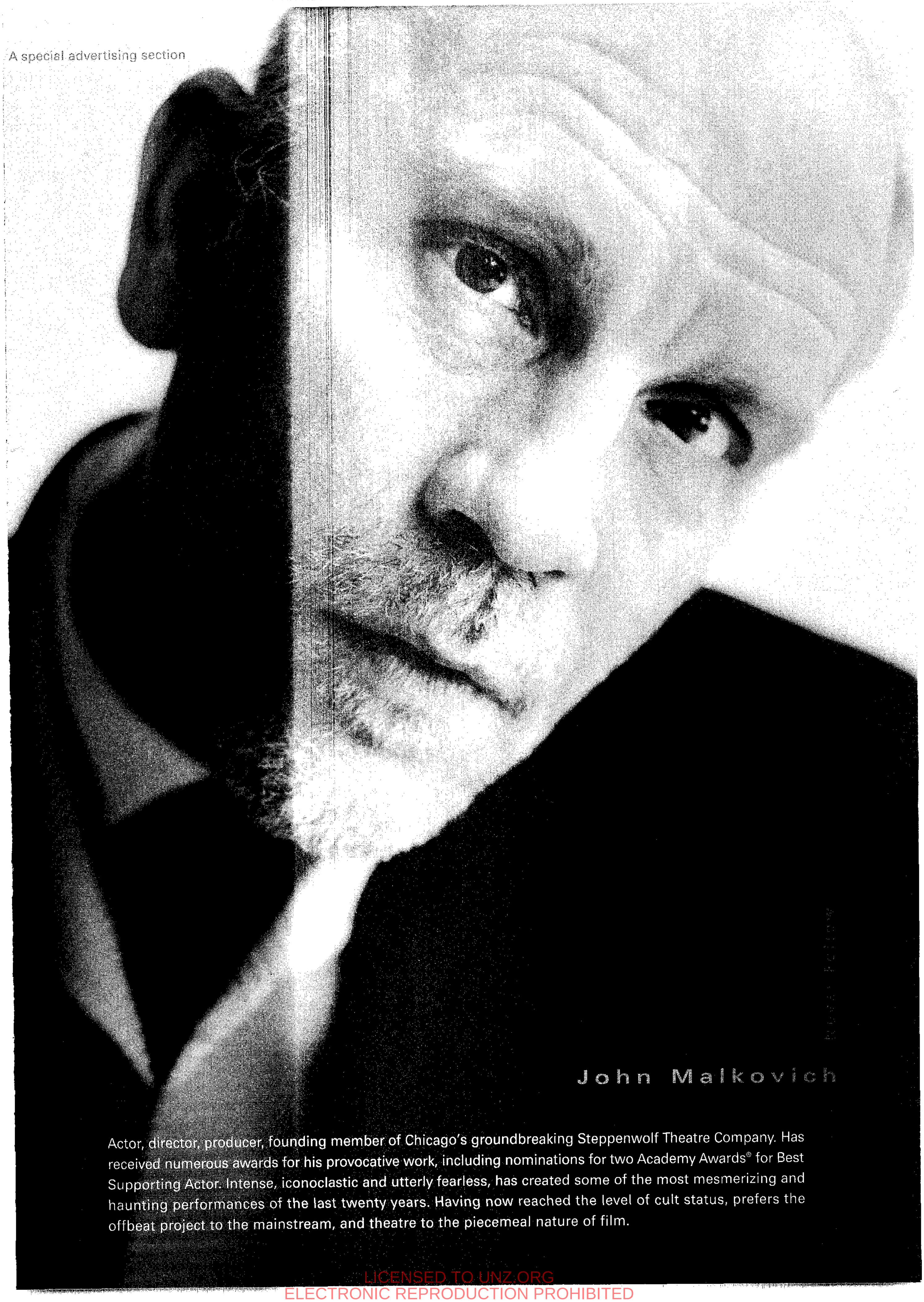


Never Follow

Narciso Rodriguez

Fashion designer. Known for his exquisite tailoring and keen attention to detail, this Cuban-American wunderkind is considered a visionary for his streamlined, highly approachable collections. Never a fan of fashion that draws attention to itself, wants his creations to frame women, not distract you from them. Forever striving to strip his designs to their purest, most beautiful form, this gifted, giving artist has dedicated his life to empowering women through his work.



John Malkovich

Actor, director, producer, founding member of Chicago's groundbreaking Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Has received numerous awards for his provocative work, including nominations for two Academy Awards® for Best Supporting Actor. Intense, iconoclastic and utterly fearless, has created some of the most mesmerizing and haunting performances of the last twenty years. Having now reached the level of cult status, prefers the offbeat project to the mainstream, and theatre to the piecemeal nature of film.

Founder of Arts Opera Promotion, artistic light producer. Mixing the latest lighting technology with traditional painting approaches, has created a new art form, transforming ordinary buildings into shimmering dream palaces, and everyday spaces into radiant wonderlands. Believing that light is the source of all life, is committed to bringing wonder to the world through her larger-than-life illuminations. More than anything, loves turning ugly buildings into joyous cathedrals of light and color.

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Bill Joy

Co-founder and Chief Scientist at Sun Microsystems, is considered one of the most influential and prolific inventors in the computer industry today. Hailed as "The Edison of the Internet," has helped design virtually every critical technology that is at the heart of the Internet, including JAVA and the UNIX operating system. A software wizard with breathtaking technological clairvoyance, cares greatly about the future of our planet, believing that what is needed most now is human, ethically responsible solutions.

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Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
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Beverly Hills City Hall
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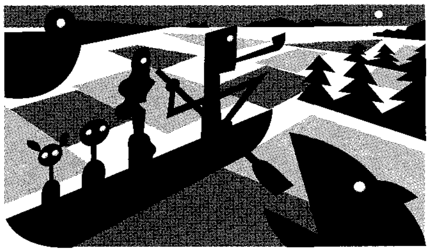
BOOK CURRENTS

It Takes a Planet

Not all parents would hang off the deck of a houseboat in Borneo to check for swimming pythons or rent anti-leech socks for a walk in a rhino sanctuary in Vietnam. But the environmental reporter Daniel Glick, trying to regain his balance after his divorce and his older brother's death, did just that in a trip around the world with his teen-age son and nine-year-old daughter. In **MONKEY DANCING** (PublicAffairs), Glick introduces endangered species and places to his children, who had been "raised on flashes of music videos and DSL Internet downloads." Glick's journalistic background informs his odyssey with a sense of scholarly urgency; "Dad," his son asks, "have many things gone extinct in your lifetime?" The trip has some of the typical trials of a family vacation—a flat tire in Bali, bickering in Kathmandu—although even the most dangerous encounters are leavened by Glick's mordant sense of humor: "The kids returned, uneaten."



RICHARD McGUIRE

Mark Jacobson also embarks on "a grand, somewhat nutty gesture," a three-month-long circumnavigation of the globe with his wife and three kids. In the forthcoming **12,000 MILES IN THE NICK OF TIME** (Atlantic Monthly), Jacobson has his own version of the traveller's gung-ho attitude: "We'd come all this way to escape the enveloping ersatz of the fetid American experience . . . to be at one with The Real. And we were going to partake of that real, goddammit." Like Glick, he wants his children to learn from the world's unpredictability. Caught on the Ganges at the start of the monsoon season, Jacobson presses on, convinced that a circumnavigation only succeeds through forward motion. "Like Moses," he writes, "I would lead my children from pop bondage."

—Lauren Porcaro

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—June 13-14: The soul icon **Isaac Hayes.** June 15-16: **B. B. King.** The guitar master celebrates the third anniversary of his New York City home. June 19-20: A visit from New Orleans' **Neville Brothers.**

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (212-228-6300)—June 12: The pioneering folk rockers **Fairport Convention.** June 14: The **Howard Fishman Quartet.** Fishman, a local guitarist and gravelly vocalist, has pushed his band (which, with the addition of a drummer, actually has five members) from the retro confines of straight-ahead small-group swing jazz to the wide-open realm of funked-up indie rock. With the astringent sounds of **Spottiswoode and His Enemies.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—June 11: The up-and-coming Irish singer **Damien Rice.** June 14: The **Electric Six** are another backward-looking band from the garage-rock epicenter of Detroit. Their flair for gloriously dumbed-down guitar rave-ups might be expected, but the Six set themselves apart by keeping a distinctly tongue-in-cheek approach and by peppering their music with jittery dance tempos and other funky flourishes. June 21: The **Dictators,** one of the cornerstones of American punk.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—June 11 and June 13-14: The amorphous tribute ensemble known as the **Loser's Lounge** tip their collective hat to the legendary yet undersung British pop practitioners XTC. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

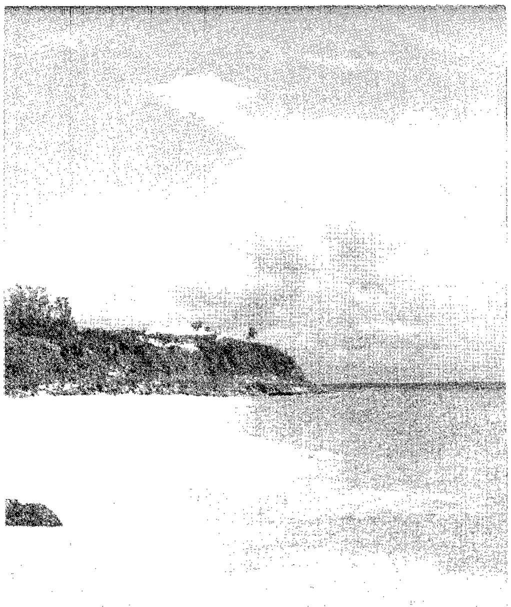
IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—June 12: **Kasey Chambers,** Australia's top female country vocalist. June 14: When the iconic American punk band Black Flag split up in 1986, the likelihood of the burly, tattooed front man **Henry Rollins'** revisiting the songs that made him a figure of respect to Mohawk-topped hardcore kids seemed remote, given the genre's earnest disdain for nostalgia. Seventeen years later, however, the Rollins Band taps into the Black Flag back catalogue in support of the West Memphis Three, a trio of Arkansas teen-agers who were convicted, some believe unfairly, of murder in the deaths of three schoolchildren in 1993. June 17: The Scottish feedback band **Mogwai.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—June 15: An evening of bossa nova with **Morelenbaum2/Sakamoto.** June 18: **Hem,** an endearing ensemble with a penchant for atypical instrumentation (pedal steel guitar, mandolin, glockenspiel) and cloudy fairy-tale melodies.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—June 18: Initially the bass player for the late post-punk godhead Public Image Limited, **Jah Wobble** practiced a blend of sparse, otherworldly playing that was as distinctive as John Lydon's signature wail. Having departed PiL at the dawn of the eighties, Wobble went on to work with a broad roster of artists, exploring his adventurous love for dance music, dub reggae, and world beat. June 20: The atmospheric minimalist pop of the **American Analog Set.** June 23-24: The beloved proto-punkster **Jonathan Richman.**

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (212-601-1000)—June 17: **Jessie Murphy,** a winning local singer-songwriter who wields a bluesy guitar. June 19: The Woodstock veteran **Richie Havens.**

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (212-777-7745)—June 24: **Britta Phillips** and **Dean Wareham,** taking a break from their day jobs with the indie-rock favorites Luna,



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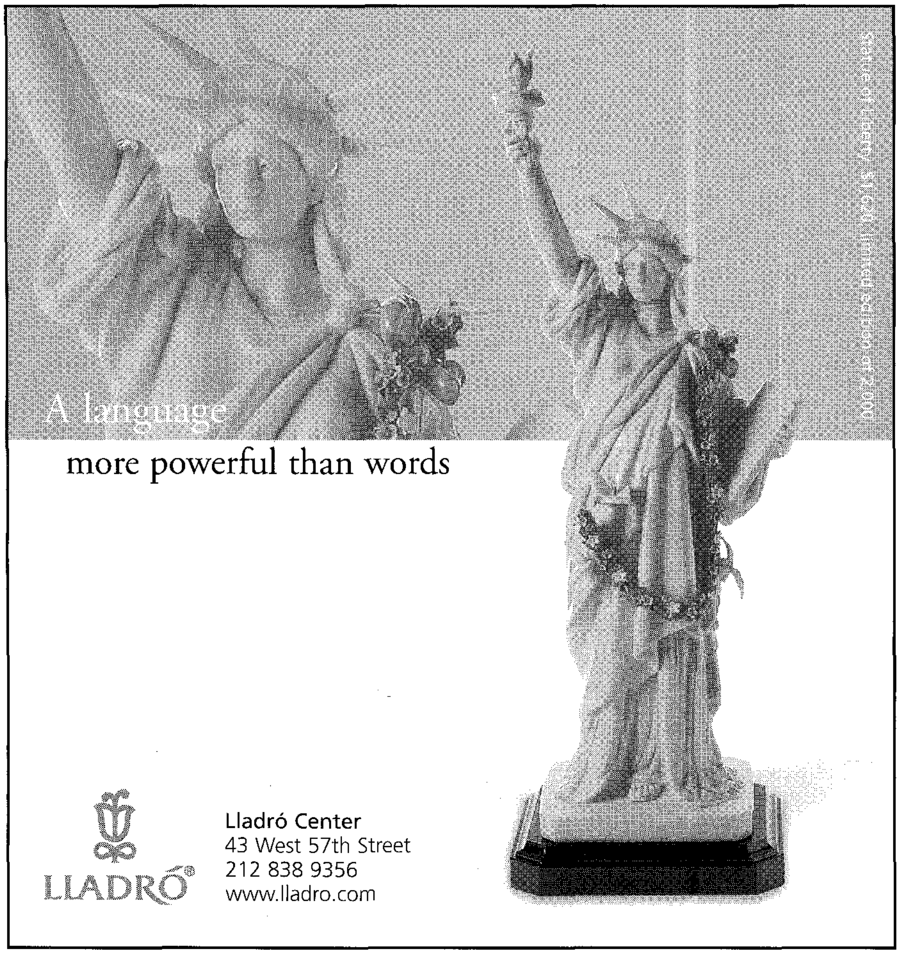

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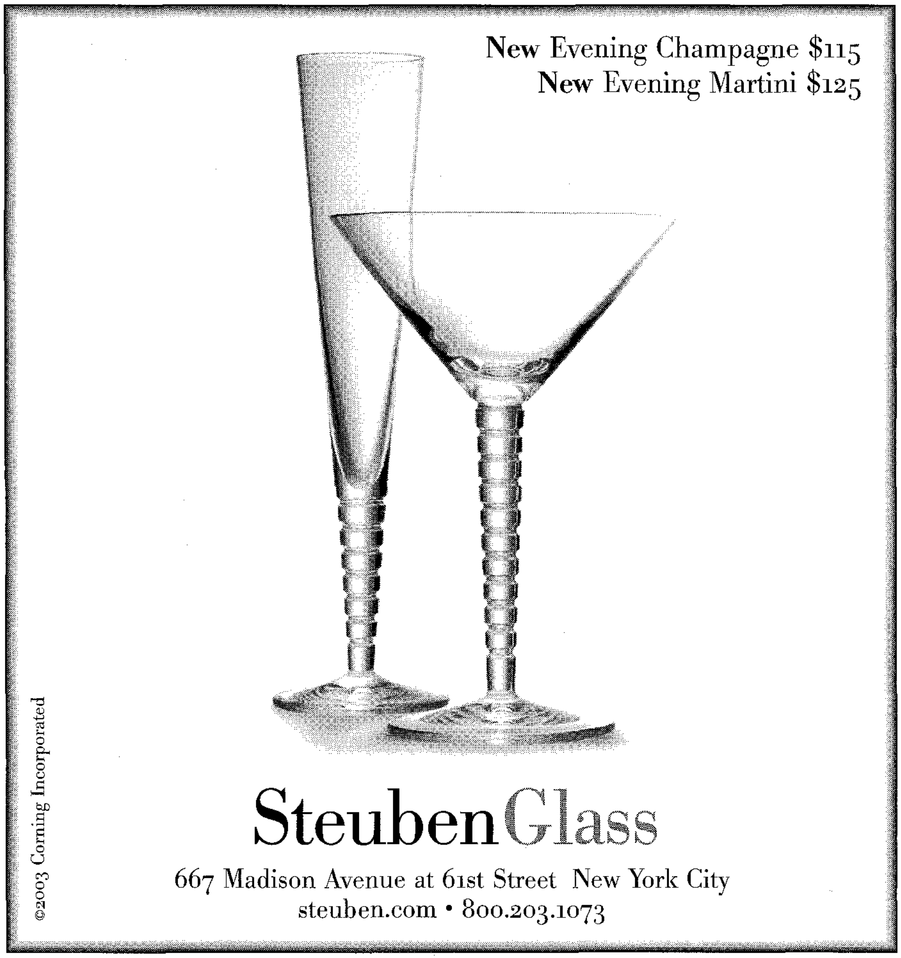

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JAZZ NOTES

GIVE THE DRUMMER SOME

There's no shortage of all-star musicianship on Roy Haynes's latest album, **"Love Letters"** (Columbia), but no one commands as much attention as Haynes himself: seventy-seven at the time of this recording, he drums with the vigor, brio, and elegance with which he once drove bands belonging to Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Sarah Vaughan, and Stan Getz. On the coda to the heated "Qué Pasa," which features the saxophonist Joshua Redman, the pianist Kenny Barron, and the astonishing bassist Christian McBride, Haynes interjects phrases as if he were playing another horn instead of the drums; on the title track, his waterfall rhythm practically dares the fleet guitarist John Scofield and the bassist Dave Holland to keep up with him.

The central role of the drummer Bobby Previte is never in doubt on his new release, **"Counterclockwise"** (Palmetto); Previte audibly goads the rest of his Bump band, including Steve Swallow, Marty Ehrlich, Curtis Fowlkes, and Wayne Horvitz, and they respond with matching high spirits. The record is nothing if not inclusive in its musical tastes—"And the Wind Cries . . . Mademoiselle Katherine" is an elegant homage-within-an-homage to Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis—and the drumming is integrated in the best sense, without a single solo.

Matt Wilson, who leads a boisterous little combo on **"Humidity"** (Palmetto), is a supremely accomplished drummer who knows when to steam and when to go light on the skins—and even when to sit out completely. Wilson's band investigates free jazz from a number of angles, attacking Ornette Coleman-inspired pieces like "Thank You Billy Higgins!" and then turning around and delicately unfolding such pensive work as "Beginning of a Memory." Like the best modern drummers—Max Roach, Ed Blackwell, and, of course, Haynes—Wilson thinks melodically when he plays, and rhythm becomes song.

—Steve Futterman

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recently came out of the recording studio with "L'Avventura," a collection of late-night love songs, which they're now taking on the road.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—June 13: **? and the Mysterians** (of "96 Tears" fame) get top billing at Cavestomp! The Garage Rock Festacular. June 15: **Dan Zanes,** a rail-thin rock-and-roller who has been enjoying a career renaissance since taking aim at the preschool set about three years ago, offers a Father's Day matinée show with snacks and treats for the kids and mimosas and Bloody Marys for the parents.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through June 15: **Four Generations of Miles Davis.** Of the four expert members of this tribute band, only the bassist **Ron Carter** and the saxophonist **George Coleman** actually played together under Miles Davis's leadership; the drummer **Jimmy Cobb,** a vet of the "Kind of Blue" recording sessions, preceded them, and the guitarist **Mike Stern** joined Davis in the eighties. Nonetheless, their individual apprenticeships should bind them into a crack bop-and-beyond band. June 17-22: The **Elvin Jones Jazz Machine.** Whether powering his own post-bop Jazz Machine or duetting with the avant-garde pianist **Cecil Taylor** (as he will be during the late shows on the 17th and 18th), the drummer Jones shows what happens when wisdom and brute force meet up in the form of an ageless seventy-five-year-old genius.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and through June 28, **Bobby Short.** On Mondays, through June 23, the café is home to **Woody Allen** and the **Eddie Davis New Orleans Jazz Band.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Loston Harris** is in attendance through June 27.

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—Saturdays and Sundays: The crystalline vocals of **Blossom Dearie.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through June 21: **Bucky Pizzarelli,** the dean of mainstream jazz guitar, joins members of his talented clan, including **John,** the noted guitarist and singer, and his daughter-in-law **Jessica Molaskey,** a charming vocalist.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—June 17-22: The JVC Jazz Festival continues with a program celebrating two legends of the clarinet, **Buddy DeFranco** and **Tony Scott.** Bebop's two finest practitioners of the instrument headline a week of shows that will find room for Don Byron, Marty Ehrlich, Kenny Davern, and others. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Through June 15: The **Luciana Souza** quartet. On her latest album, "North and South," the singer elegantly takes on Brazilian favorites and durable American standards, flaunting her high style on both. June 17-22: **Archie Shepp** and **Roswell Rudd.** The saxophonist Shepp and the trombonist Rudd's interaction isn't quite as volatile as it was during the free-jazz heyday of the mid-sixties, but there's still more than enough bluster and grit to remind us of what we've been missing. The bassist **Reggie Workman** and the drummer **Andrew Cyrille,** two vets of the sixties trenches, provide genuine rhythmic tumble.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—June 18: The **Terrell Stafford Band.** It's a quirk of fate that Stafford has not attained the visibility of his fellow bop trumpeters Terence Blanchard and Roy Hargrove; he can give both a run for their money.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through June 15: The **Chucho Valdés** quartet is joined by **Wycliffe Gordon.** On the face of it, the Cuban pianist Valdés and the trombonist Gordon may not seem to have much in common, but exuberance and virtuosity can bring together the strangest of bedfellows. Individual brilliance is assured; whether they can achieve unity remains the big mystery. June 17-22: The saxophonist **Gary Bartz.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—If the contents of the Iraqi National Museum had gone touring, instead of missing, the resulting show might have looked something like **"Art of the First Cities,"** a gravely opulent survey of Mesopotamian artifacts from the span of the third millennium B.C. As a history lesson, the show is understandably unwieldy, but it's full of strange fascinations in gold, ivory, lapis, and diorite: naked priest kings, lioness demons, cuneiform accounting ledgers, and a board game. The exhibition attests to the aesthetic refinement of Ur bureaucrats and leaves one wondering whether their successors in Washington and Baghdad could use a lesson or two in diplomatic finesse from Joan Aruz and Mahrukh Tarapor, who persuaded fifty museums in a sixteen countries to loan works for the show. Through Aug. 17. ♦ Contemporary viewers who associate Charles Demuth with Precisionism may think of factories before flowers, but Demuth was a master watercolorist whose floral still-lifes influenced Georgia O'Keeffe. Twenty-six works on paper—the museum's entire collection—are on view, including a

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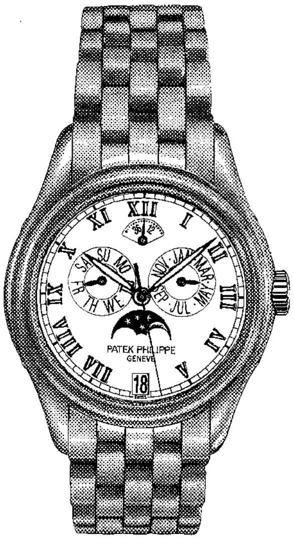

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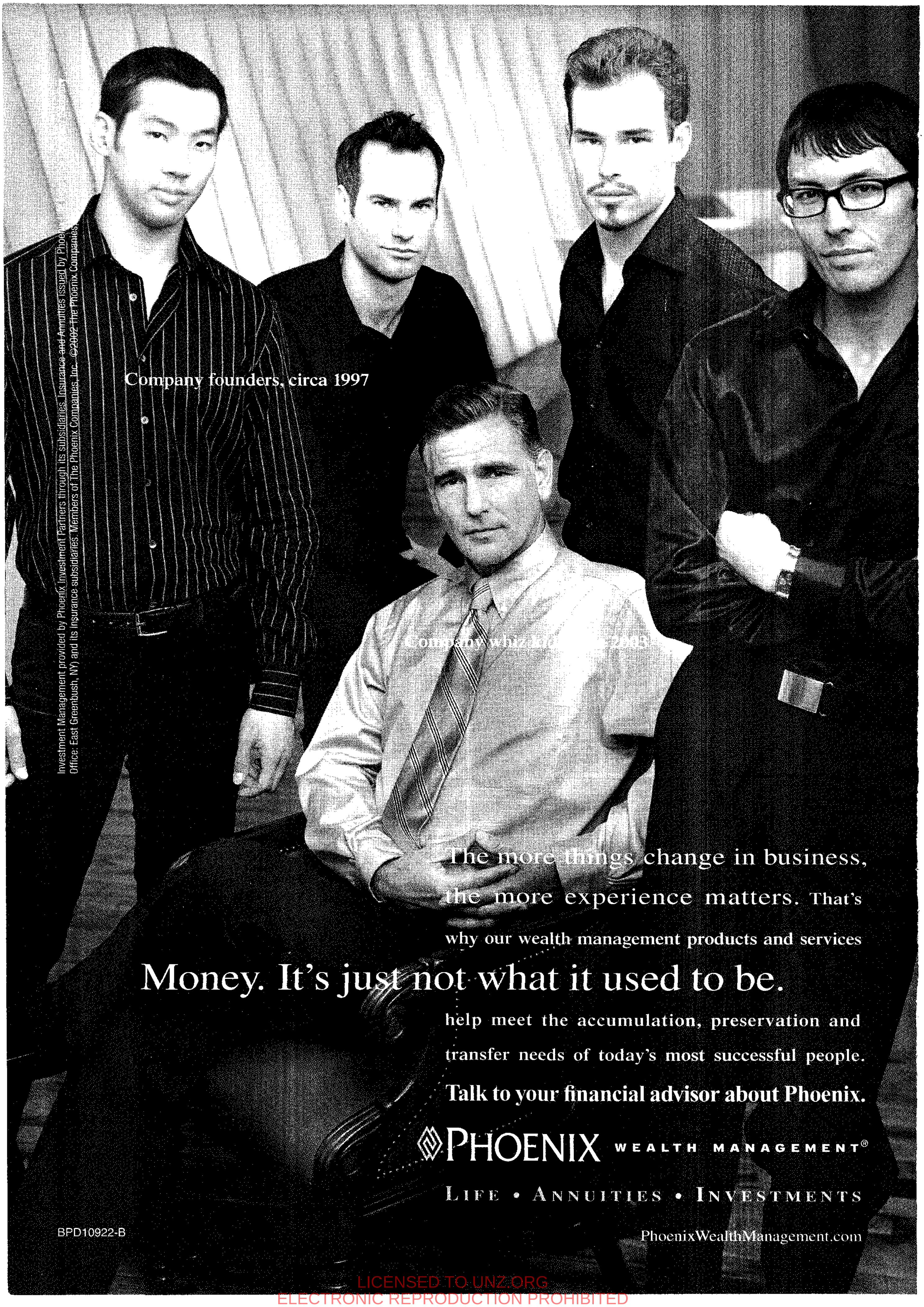

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stunning study of poppies from 1929 and an unfinished still-life of tulips (a pencil sketch with painted leaves) that reveals his technique of pooling and blotting. The big surprise is an ethereal view of the Seine, from 1913. The museum didn't know it owned the image, which was painted on the back of another landscape, until preparing for this show. Through Aug. 31. ♦ After witnessing the atrocities of the First World War as a medic, the German painter Max Beckmann took up Expressionism to "reproach God for his errors." The museum recently acquired the famous "Hell" portfolio, eleven black-and-white lithographs that chronicle Beckmann's visit to Berlin in 1919 during the March Rebellion, when twelve hundred people were killed in two days. The original owner of the portfolio, the industrialist Hugo Stinnes, appears in a stinging caricature as a puppeteer dangling a marionette emperor, surrounded by human skulls and sacks of cash. This series' masterly balance between chaotic and carnivalesque is an amuse-bouche for the artist's retrospective opening at MOMA QNS at the end of June. Through Aug. 31. ♦ A playful roof-garden sculpture—a painted aluminum cottage with a red roof, white and yellow walls, and a blue chimney—by Roy Lichtenstein, the late Pop artist, sits on its own little lawn with a sign warning viewers to keep off the grass. Through Nov. 2. ♦ **"Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting."** Through June 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

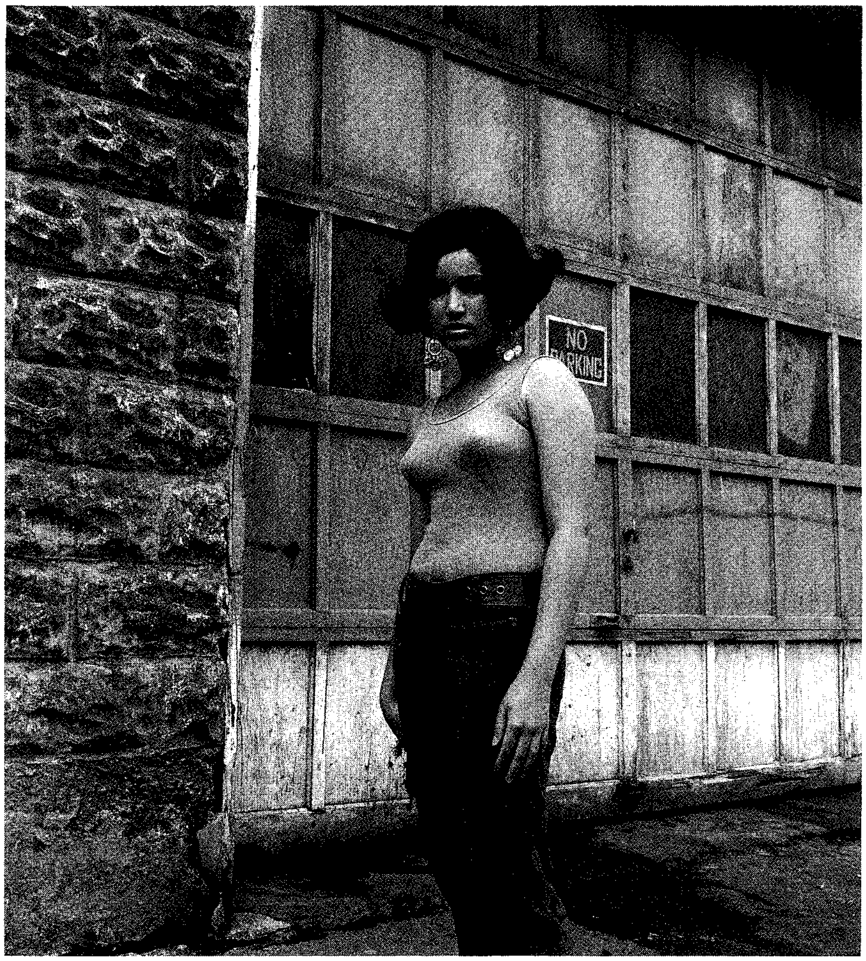
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Back in 1964, when Andy Warhol began shooting his **"Screen Tests,"** a three-minute "live" portrait might have seemed like an amusing but slight conceit. Since then, the burgeoning influence of the format (cf. Thomas Struth's huge projected portraits recently exhibited at the Metropolitan), along with the explosion of reality media, has made those first performances look eerily prescient. They're also captivating, partly because Warhol chose so many charismatic and beautiful subjects, among them Dennis Hopper, Gerard Malanga, Edie Sedgwick, Salvador Dali, and "Baby" Jane Holzer, who does some of the sexiest toothbrushing imaginable. Through Sept. 1. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism"** is a concise, bewitching show of paintings, drawings, and sculptures—many of them making their first trip outside Russia—that vivify the artist's revolutionary art and ideas. His definitive "Black Square," from 1915, is in terrible physical shape; it suffered in Soviet archives during Malevich's long official suppression. A tragic air extends even to mint-condition Suprematist works, which, with deep roots in Western aesthetics and Russian mysticism, conjured a Utopia of matter-of-fact materiality and cerebral rapture. Malevich confidently claimed that he worked in five "measures," the fifth being "economy." In the spell of his grandiose and doomed optimism, one can well believe that or pretty much anything. This show is important to any general assessment of modern art. Through Sept. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—In this retrospective devoted to the works of Elie Nadelman, more than two hundred sculptures, arranged chronologically, trace the evolution of Nadelman's concerns: from his early busts, which speak to ancient ideals of beauty, to his jazz-era middle works, folksy wooden genre figures of dancers and circus performers with sinuous bodies and gessoed features, to his final postwar efforts, rows of plaster figurines that look like toy-size gods and monsters. Through July 20. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Robert Lesser, whose collection of toy robots wintered at the museum a couple of years ago, has loaned another pop trove: more than a hundred paintings for the covers of pulp magazines, primarily from the thirties and forties. The artists were academically trained illustrators like J. Allen St. John, Rafael De Soto, and Walter Baumhofer, and they worked in a fiercely competitive environment that nourished pictorial testosterone. If you're curious to see the unreconstructed masculine id in action or haven't sublimated a thirst for bound blondes or spurting pistols under titles like "The Grove of Doom," this exhibit is a kitsch cornucopia. Through Aug. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
Columbus Ave. at 65th St. (212-595-9533)—Jacob Kass (1910-2000), a longtime commercial sign painter, retired and set his skilled hand to finely detailed decorative oils—what makes them folk art? In this case, it's both the rural, antique surfaces he paints on—the handsaws, sickles, and circular saw blades that guide his long, curving compositions and pinwheeling perspectives—and the nostalgia of his subject matter, from apple picking to innocent subway scenes. Through July 13. (Open Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 7:30.)



An untitled portrait by Milton Rogovin at the New-York Historical Society.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

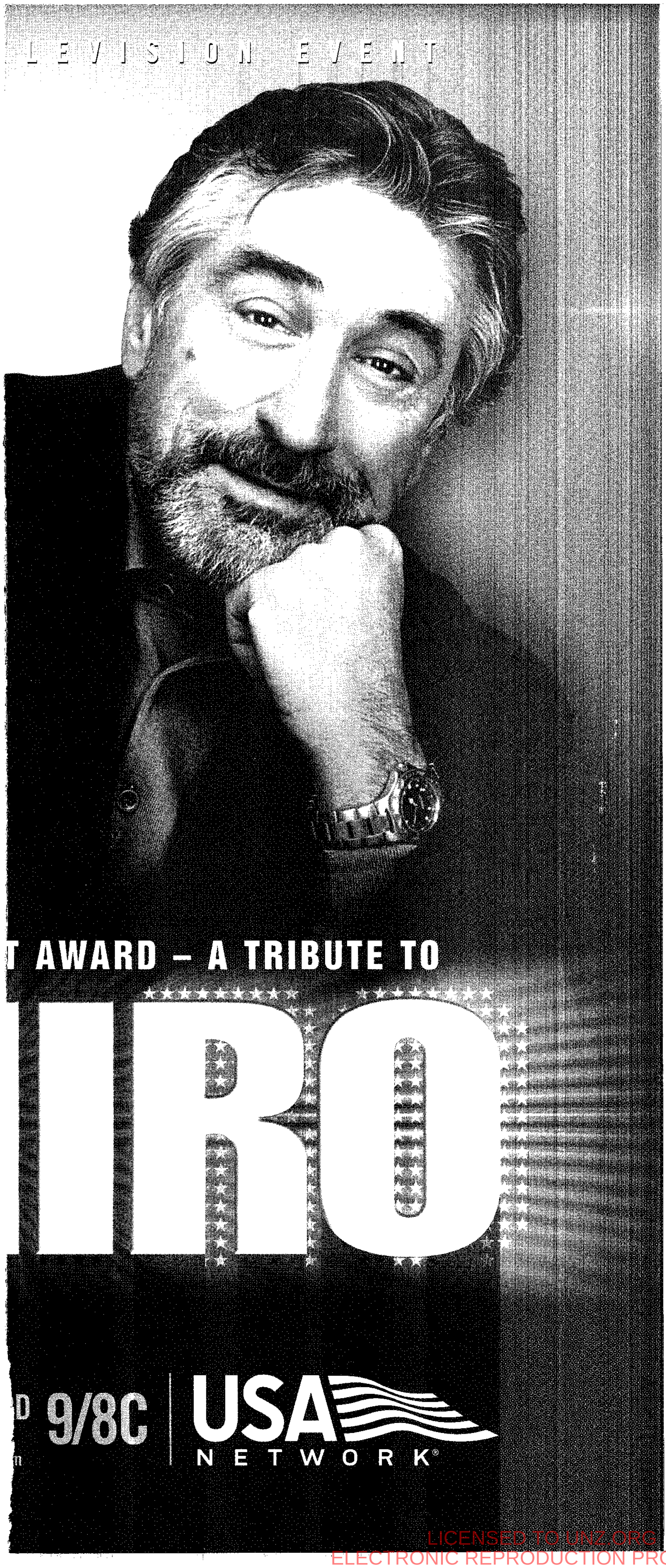
Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MARIKO MORI
Mori's "UFO" is a huge, gleaming fibreglass teardrop into which visitors, whose foreheads have been affixed with electrodes by gentle white-clad attendants, are admitted three at a time for six-and-a-half-minute head trips. Plugged in and lying back, one observes projected blobs that, it is promised, register one's alpha, beta, and theta brain waves, in real time, by way of changes in color and position. A recent trio of viewers (or should that be subjects?) decided that their own experimental results had been inconclusive. At that moment, apparently for the hell of it, the ceiling went psychedelic with torrents of bursting and shimmering animation. Does the pleasure of the experience outweigh a likely sense of having miserably failed a test of one's spiritual attunement? Through July 31. (Public Art Fund, 590 Madison Ave., at 56th St. 212-980-3942.)

AMY MYERS
Large-scale abstract drawings that threaten to burst beyond the edge of the frame, like ornate tornadoes. Myers is the daughter of a particle physicist and shares her father's fascination with the mysteries of complex systems. Her compositions, intricate symmetries that balance menace and grace, teem with affinities, from Islamic art to H. R. Giger to lace. Occasionally, the forms take on the anthropomorphic aspect of a dervish whirling through infinite space. Through June 27. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 212-223-2227.)

"IN SEARCH OF THE 'TOTAL ARTWORK'"
Since 1966, Galerie St. Etienne has been organizing voluptuously scholarly shows of Austrian modernism. This one focusses on the aesthetic ideal that, in principle anyway, links Richard Wagner to Austin Powers: the search for the "Gesamtkunstwerk," a completely coördinated visual environment. Posters, inkwells, silverware, furniture, architectural drawings, and jewelry are on view, in varying degrees of Art Nouveau wooziness or luxe-industrial severity. Though their design sensibilities varied, these Austrian idealists had one thing firmly in mind: clients who were prepared to make a total commitment. Through June 14. (24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)

"THREE ARTISTS FROM GUADALAJARA"
Three young Mexican artists from what is apparently a vibrant scene in Guadalajara arrive with



fetching conceptual styles of painting, photography, and language work. Ruben Mendez makes small, tenderly stroked oils of mixed commercial signs and big paintings of popular icons—a puppy, an American eagle—in a style that suggests both crude digital imaging and needlepoint. Gonzalo Lebrija photographs landscapes reflected in car bodies and, in a series shot in a sterile Wal-Mart parking garage, such tiny anomalies as a dog transfixed by a far-distant cat. Jorge Mendez Blake mounts panels of text from "Macbeth," marked with his studentish underlinings, questions, translations, and doodles, such as a graphite smudge for the "damned spot." All three artists stir thrills of discovery. Through June 27. (Ramis-Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 212-644-9090.)

Short List

SHARON ELLIS
Artemis Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through June 27.
THOMAS SCHÜTTE
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 28.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

JILL LEVINE
Smallish relief sculptures in oil-painted hard modelling clay deploy images of Hindu deities on fantastic topographies of bulbous, looping, twisting, all but writhing forms. The works are sullen clumps when seen from afar. Up close, they explode with glories of intricate pattern and sweet, radiant color. Krishna, Ganesh, Kali, et al. materialize at certain viewing angles. Levine's use of devotional iconography seems cold-bloodedly pragmatic: she likes how it looks. The effect suggests remarkably attentive tourism. Through June 28. (P.P.O.W, 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044.)

LISA YUSKAVAGE
The women in Yuskavage's paintings—no longer the erogenous mannequins that irked audiences in the early nineties, but not quite real people either—prowl and preen in a voluptuous, anticipatory haze. Sometime soon, phones or doorbells will ring. In the meantime, these plump, snub-nosed creatures work themselves over in front of the mirror, assessing outfits, bracelets, perfumes, postures. Yuskavage's world suggests a boudoir version of "Waiting for Godot," a place where sex is always feared, desired, imminent, and remote. In an art world that's full of borrowings from literal, in-your-face porn, Yuskavage's soft-core sublime sets her apart. Through June 27. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889.)

Short List

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 21.
DAMIEN LOEB
Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through June 28.
FRANK STELLA
Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through June 28.
FRED TOMASELLI
James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-741-9500. Through June 21.

GALLERIES-SOHO

MARTHA ARMSTRONG
Within the lively backwater of perceptual painting, Armstrong is a star. Here she shows off—or gives in to—her own stubbornness, painting the same unremarkable view more than thirty times: a grove of scraggly pines, with a shed and the railing of her deck in the foreground. It's not exactly Rouen Cathedral. Armstrong turns this rural site into a plein-air laboratory, and a metaphor for redeemed modesty. Over the smooth forms of the milled wood, live trunks

and branches loom, making violent, razzing, pinwheel gestures. Armstrong's high, sharp energy is Yankee Fauvism at its best. Through June 18. (Wickiser, 568 Broadway. 212-941-1817.)

COREY MC CORKLE
McCorkle pays homage to Findhorn, a gardening community in northeast Scotland founded in 1962 by three friends who considered divine intervention responsible for their robust crops (forty-pound cabbages were run of the mill). On the ground floor, a billboard-like plywood wall runs the length of the space, plastered on both sides with posters of the garden. Upstairs, there are nearly invisible drawings of iron gates, etched in the wall with a razor—the visual equivalent of a whisper. The third floor is transformed into a chapel by a circular window filled with crosscuts of bamboo arranged to suggest pebbles at the bottom of a stream or stones set in a country wall. Through June 30. (Maccarone, 45 Canal St. 212-431-4977.)

BRUCE PEARSON
Pearson's complete works, which are primarily word based, must be approaching the length of a novella by now. Each of his paintings builds a graphic extravaganza on a title phrase—"the ridiculous bodies of the spirits," or "metal benders and world reactions"—which he conceals in a heavily lined gouache sketch, then carves into chunks of Styrofoam, assembles in a mosaic, and covers in eye-popping shades of oil and acrylic. Even the few comparatively restrained works, the ones without the artist's hallmark harlequin color and acidhead Op-art look, are powerful enough to make eyes and minds, in the words of one piece, "wiggle and twitch." Through June 14. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

"TERRIBLE BEAUTY"
A few years ago, there was talk of SoHo galleries' moving out to Williamsburg. With the opening of this show in a space above Fanelli's, Roebling Hall, one of Brooklyn's senior galleries, wryly colonizes the motherland, turning SoHo into a Williamsburg satellite. The show itself is a mixed grill of figuration, photography, and abstraction. The standout here, the English artist Hew Locke, gives the late Princess Diana a psychedelic, Jimi Hendrix-style makeover. Through June 21. (Satellite, 94 Prince St. 718-599-5352.)

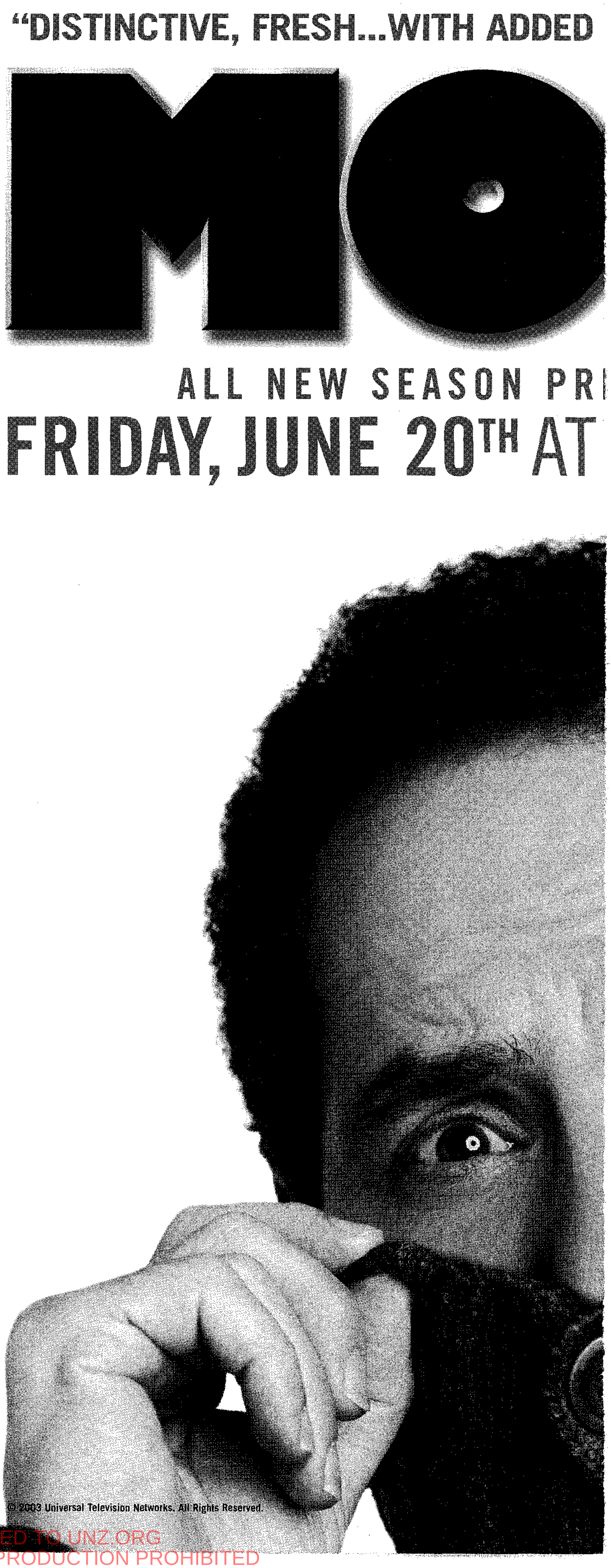
THE THREE
The premise for this agreeable meta-spoof—part Sokol hoax, part "Dunciad"—is that sometime around 1990, three anonymous models met on a catwalk in Tokyo and decided to become a conceptual art team. They don't reveal their own identities, give interviews, or make objects. Their art is, gasp, their own publicity. Pinned to the wall, an impressive trail of clippings (many written by the British journalist Adrian Dannatt) project a tone of skepticism, amusement, and complicity. Through June 14. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

GALLERIES-BROOKLYN

DOUG HENDERS
These gray-and-white oils look a bit like line drawings on canvas, with several copies of the same image doodled over one another—as four overlapping faces inhale from a cigarette, four on the opposite side of the canvas exhale—or several frames in sequence piled one on top of another. A few, including "Recliners," whose sexy chaos of butts and feet in the air obscures any action, are hard to follow, but the sparer portraits eloquently reveal their subjects, dancing and fidgeting in the center of the frame. Through June 22. (Jack the Pelican Presents, 487 Driggs Ave. 718-782-0183.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

PIERRE ET GILES
The indefatigable purveyors of stunningly obvious photographic camp show new and old candy-colored, gaudily framed pictures that range from kinky beefcake and kinky cheesecake to kinky religious and kinky contemporary-arty. A vaguely Cindy Shermanish recent series of soft-porn phantasmagoria displays multiple closeup body parts with irregular mirrored surfaces, suggesting cosmic



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orgies that are dark, wet, and, well, self-conscious. To call the work of Pierre et Giles pandering kitsch is like calling George W. Bush a Republican. You speak the truth but have barely cleared your throat on the subject. Through June 28. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

MILTON ROGOVIN
Now ninety-three, Rogovin was labelled "Buffalo's Top Red" by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1958, after he had organized the city's optometrists' union. He subsequently lost his practice, picked up a camera, and began to photograph local storefront churches. In the early seventies, he began the project for which he'll be remembered, several thousand portraits of the residents of Buffalo's Lower West Side, at the time a neighborhood of struggling African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Indian immigrants. Evoking the work of Walker Evans or Shelby Lee Adams, Rogovin captured the stoic pride evident on young parents' faces and unbridled joy on the dance floor at the end of a long week spent in a steel mill. Unlike many social documentarians, Rogovin returned to rephotograph his subjects in the eighties, the nineties, and two years ago. The results of this work, sets of four pictures shown with an accompanying interview, have a palpable sense of lost time and the inevitability of growing old. Opens June 17. (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 212-873-3400.)

JONATHAN TORGOVNIK
The lush prints shown here go behind the scene in Bollywood, India's answer to our own La-La Land. Whether showing dancers—in outfits that recall the American television program "Logan's Run"—practicing a routine, or street scenes in Mumbai that seem to be populated with more actors on posters than cab drivers, Torgovnik captures the riotous color and intense energy that go into making a musical epic. A portrait of a young woman sitting with her newborn in a home with walls made from old movie posters is tragic in its reality and exuberant in its execution, but the set shots steal the show. In one image, the two stars Govinda and Sonali Bendre, dancing in a dry, grassy field with nearly twenty black-and-silver-clad women flapping head scarves in unison behind them, could be singing, "Saris, jewels, action!" Through Aug. 15. (Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 212-741-4764.)

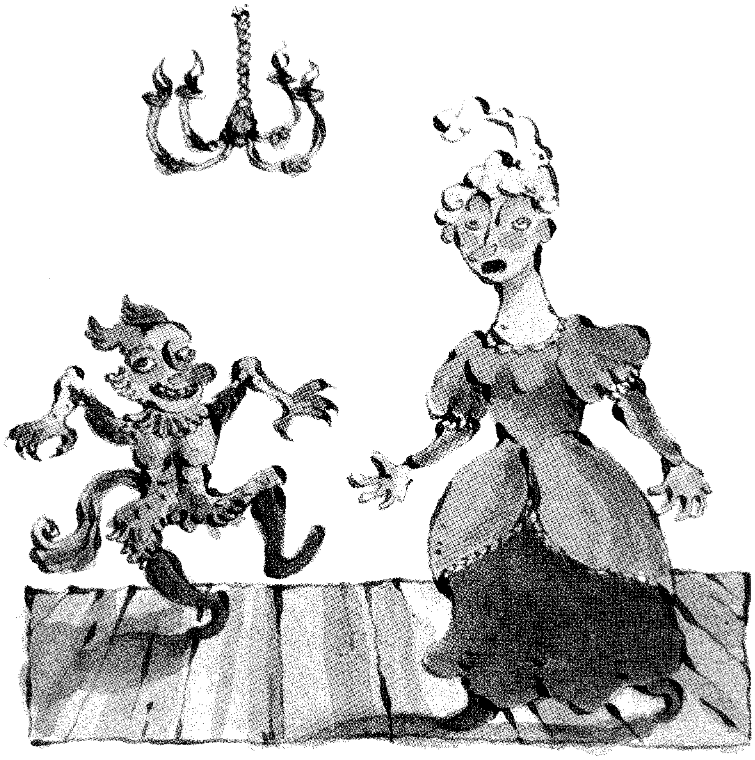
Short List

RONG RONG
Chambers, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-1169. Through June 21.

MARIANA YAMPOLSKY
Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059. Through June 28.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
June 12 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Antiquities. ♦ June 19 at 10:15 A.M.: The Indiana educator Nick Karanovich fell in love with Mark Twain long before the politics of "Huckleberry Finn" became the subject of graduate dissertations and school-curriculum battles; from the nineteen-sixties on, he collected everything connected to the straight-talking humorist from Missouri. Among the highlights are a small, touching oil portrait of Twain's favorite daughter, Susy, who died in 1896 while he was lecturing abroad; a lime-green, illustrated first edition of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" ("At the end of an hour we saw a far-away town sleeping in a valley. . . . 'Bridgeport?' said I, pointing. 'Camelot,' said he"); a silver-print portrait of Twain wearing his trademark white broadcloth suit; and hundreds of movie posters, including an Italian poster for "Il Principe e il Povero," with Errol Flynn beaming as he arcs his duelling sword. ♦ June 19 at 2 and June 20 at 10 A.M. and 2: A three-part sale devoted to furniture, carpets, and decorative art. ♦ June 20 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Books and manuscripts, including Americana. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



Johann Georg Conradi's "Ariadne" (1691), one of the first important works of German opera, opens the season at Berkshire Opera on June 20.

SERGIO RUZZIER

CHRISTIE'S
June 11 at 10 A.M. and June 12 at 10 A.M. and 2: A sale of antiquities. ♦ June 12 at 10 A.M.: "The Failure of Sir Gawain," a tapestry by Morris & Co. from 1893-95, highlights the first of three sessions of twentieth-century decorative art. ♦ June 13 at 10 A.M. and 2: The concluding sessions of the sale, which also includes a broad selection of furniture and Tiffany glass. ♦ June 17 at 10 A.M. and 2: Letters by Thomas Jefferson and Ponce de León (the first letter by the Spanish explorer ever to be offered at auction) highlight a sale of books and manuscripts including Americana. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

PHILLIPS
June 11 at 10 A.M. and 2: Works by Eileen Gray, Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann, and George Nakashima highlight a sale of design from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

"MET IN THE PARKS"
The Metropolitan Opera spreads its wings throughout the parks of New York and New Haven for a round of free performances. **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** with Olga Makarina in the title role and Francisco Casanova in the role of Edgardo; Edoardo Müller conducts. (Cunningham Park, Queens. June 11.) ♦ With Elizabeth Futral and Frank Lopardo; Müller. (Marine Park, Brooklyn. June 14. ♦ Great Lawn, Central Park; enter at 86th St. June 16. ♦ Pelham Bay Park, the Bronx. June 20.) ♦ **"Turandot,"** with Audrey Stottler (in the title role), Hei-Kyung Hong, Carl Tanner, and Andrew Gangestad; Joseph Colaneri. (Miller Field, Gateway National Recreation Area, Staten Island. June 13.) ♦ With Andrea Gruber, Hong, Franco Farina, and Oren Gradus; Colaneri. (New Haven Green, New Haven, Conn. June 18. ♦ Pelham Bay Park, the Bronx. June 21.) ♦ (Note: All concerts begin at 8. No tickets necessary. For more information, call 212-362-6000.)

PARIS NATIONAL OPERA: "LES BORÉADES"
To attend a performance by Les Arts Florissants is to experience operagoing at its most refined; William Christie, the ensemble's director, makes a fetish of exactitude, but his re-creations of the great works of the French Baroque have an exquisite, concentrated energy that is unsurpassed. He is a favorite at BAM, and for his latest production he teams up with a longtime collaborator, the director Robert Carsen, to produce Rameau's mythological *tragédie en musique*, a remarkably vigorous and daring work that brought the composer's long operatic career to a fiery close. Anna-Maria Panzarella, Paul Agnew, and Laurent Naouri are among the featured singers. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. June 11 and June 13 at 7:30 and June 15 at 2. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Lorin Maazel's latest concert, the first of two programs that close the subscription season, opens with the doomy complexity of Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony (the least popular, and the most interesting, of the composer's three), then gives way to Glenn Dicterow's traversal of Miklós Rózsa's Violin Concerto, a daunting work written in 1956 for Jascha Heifetz; Maazel, an amazingly precise manipulator of orchestral timbres, wraps things up with the splashy sounds and vivid colors of Ravel's "Rhapsodie Espagnole." (June 12 and June 17 at 7:30, June 13 at 2, and June 14 at 8.) ♦ The New York première of Aaron Jay Kernis's "Simple Songs" makes a fitting pendant to this final program's main offering, Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony. Both works exude a powerful, ecumenically oriented spirituality that's backed up by some terrific orchestration; Kernis's forces are tiny compared to Mahler's, but he gets more punch out of a chamber orchestra than just about anyone. The soprano Jessica Jones, the mezzo-soprano Cornelia Kallisch, and the New York Choral Artists assist; Maazel conducts. (June 19 at 7:30 and June 20-21 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
Shulamit Ran, an Israeli-American composer of rugged modernist scores, has recently been inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters; she's also the composer of a new Violin Concerto that will be premièred in this concert by the violinist for whom it was written, Ittai Shapira. The program also features the soprano Sumi Jo, who joins the group for arias by Strauss (Zerbinetta's coloratura cavalcade from "Ari-

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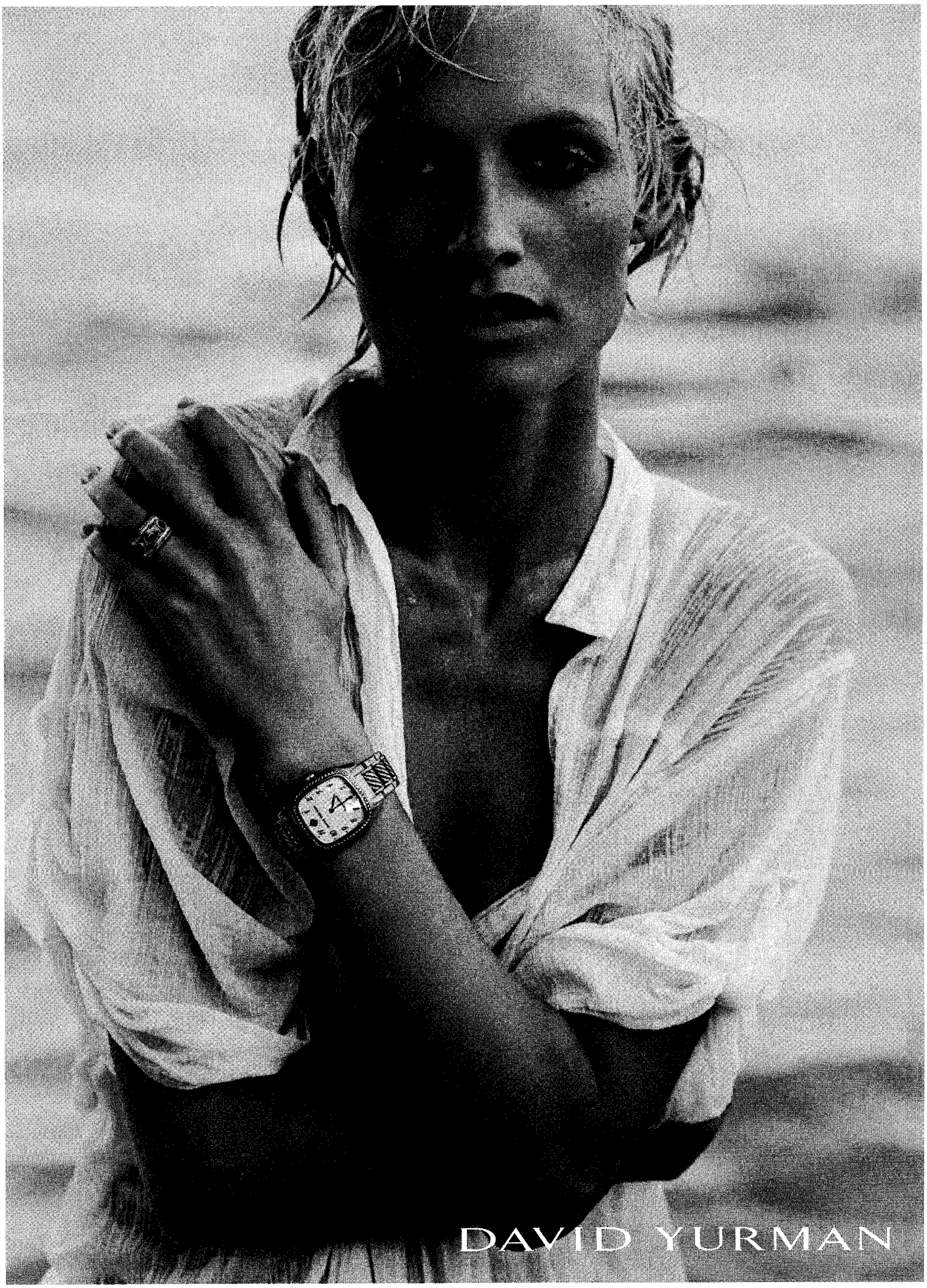
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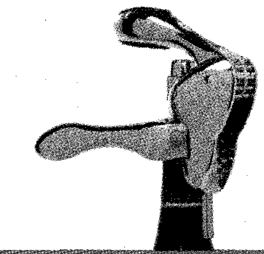


For more information, visit www.metrokane.com

adne auf Naxos") and Mozart; Charles Hazlewood conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. June 13 at 8.)

GAY GOTHAM CHORUS
Cherubini's rarely heard Requiem in D Minor, an alluringly dark-hued work in a severe, late-Classical style, is the highlight of a concert by New York's only gay men's chorus dedicated to classical music, which also features a new work by Paul Moravec ("No Words," a September 11th tribute, with the pianist James Lent) and a piece by Ned Rorem. (Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, West End Ave. at 86th St. 212-362-3179. June 21 at 8.)

RECITALS

DANIEL BARENBOIM: THE BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS
The brilliant Israeli conductor, pianist, and intellectual, as close to a Renaissance man as classical music offers these days, continues an eight-concert series traversing all of Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas, a mini-festival that will close Carnegie Hall's spring season. June 12: The Sonatas No. 2 in A Major, No. 10 in G Major, No. 17 in D Minor, and No. 26 in E-Flat Major ("Les Adieux"). ♦ June 15: The Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, "Pathétique," begins a concert that also includes the Sonatas No. 12 in A-Flat Major, No. 25 in G Major, and No. 28 in A Major. ♦ June 17: The Sonatas No. 5 in C Minor, No. 11 in B-Flat Major, No. 19 in G Minor, No. 20 in G Major, and No. 23 in F Minor (the "Appassionata"). ♦ June 19: The "Waldstein" Sonata (No. 21 in C Major) closes a program that also features the Sonatas No. 13 in E-Flat Major, No. 7 in D Major, and No. 27 in E Minor. ♦ June 22: The Sonatas No. 3 in C Major, No. 24 in F-Sharp Major, No. 30 in E Major, and No. 15 in D Major (the "Pastoral"). ♦ June 24: Barenboim's penultimate concert features not only the "Moonlight" Sonata (No. 14 in C-Sharp Minor) but also the Sonata No. 31 in A-Flat Major—Beethoven's penultimate sonata, a bit of sunset before the night. (Isaac Stern Auditorium. 212-247-7800. All concerts begin at 7:30. Through June 26.)

BARGEMUSIC
Brooklyn's floating chamber-music venue hosts an all-Beethoven series. Here are some highlights: June 14 at 7:30 and June 15 at 4: The violinist Mikhail Kopelman, the cellist Misha Quint, and the pianist Paul Ostrovsky play the Trios in E-Flat Major (transcribed from the Septet) and D Major (an arrangement of the Second Symphony). ♦ June 19-20 at 7:30: Mark Peskanov and Randall Hodgkinson sally through several of the Sonatas for Violin and Piano (including the "Kreutzer" and the "Spring"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ALLIANCE: A TRIBUTE TO ROGER SESSIONS
Roger Sessions, the flinty twelve-toner who founded the A.C.A. with Aaron Copland in 1938 and then moved on to become an enormously influential composition teacher at Princeton, is the focus for the organization's sixty-fifth-anniversary concert, which will feature not only music by Sessions but also by his students and friends (including David Del Tredici, who will also perform at the piano, and Milton Babbitt, who, with the soprano Bethany Beardslee, will offer some opening remarks). (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 212-362-8900. June 14 at 8.)

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS
Downtown's reigning new-music ensemble presents a pair of special concerts. June 14 at 9: Steve Reich and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore sit in with the group for the People's Commissioning Fund Concert, which will include performances of their works. ♦ June 15 at 1: The annual Bang On a Can Marathon, ten hours long, which will feature a new music-theatre work by Evan Ziporyn. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

OUT OF TOWN

SOUTH SHORE MUSIC SERIES: ADAM NEIMAN
The young American pianist performs a recital of Bach, Chopin, Fauré, and Schumann (the formidable Symphonic Études, Op. 113). (Saugatuck Congregational Church, 245 Post Rd. E., Westport, Conn. 866-776-8745. June 13 at 8.)

HUDSON VALLEY CHAMBER MUSIC CIRCLE
June 14 at 8: The Miami String Quartet, elegant young players strongly anchored in the Romantic tradition, play music by Haydn, Ginastera, and Beethoven (the Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1). ♦ June 21 at 8: A concert by the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, who offer works by Moszkowski, Mozart, Ravel, and Schumann (the Piano Quartet); the violinist Jennifer Koh is their special guest. (Olin Hall, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 518-537-6665.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
June 15 at 3: A new quartet by the American composer Tom Nelson leads off a concert by the young Avalon String Quartet (Juilliard's recent quartet-in-residence), who also play music by Haydn and Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, with Alpin Hong). ♦ June 22 at 3: The first of two weekends with the Jacques Thibaud String Trio (three fastidious young musicians from France), who team up with the flautist Eugenia Zukerman to offer a crazy-quilt program of Haydn, Hennessy, Villa-Lobos, and Mozart (the Flute Quartet in A Major) along with several Mozart arrangements of Bach preludes and fugues. (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

BERKSHIRE OPERA: "ARIADNE"
Massachusetts' western region, rich in orchestral and chamber music but poor in opera, is well served by this growing company, which holds many of its performances in the splendidly refurbished Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, a ninety-eight-year-old former movie house. Their opening production, a collaboration with the renowned Boston Early Music Festival, is of "Ariadne"—not Strauss's, but the 1691 opera by Johann Georg Conradi, the earliest surviving score of the Hamburg opera school and a vivacious mix of French, German, and Venetian influences. Paul O'Dette and Stephen Stubbs are the artistic directors; Drew Minter is the stage director. (14 Castle St., Great Barrington, Mass. 413-442-0099. June 20-21 at 7 and June 22 at 2:30.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
It was at Caramoor, twenty-five seasons ago, that the members of the still-young St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble first expanded themselves into what would be named the Orchestra of St. Luke's—which would soon become one of the mainstays of New York's concert life. June 21 at 7: Peter Oundjian, the festival's artistic director, conducts the orchestra in the opening concert of the season, a program of Rossini, Tchaikovsky (the Violin Concerto, with Gil Shaham), and Mozart. ♦ June 22 at 4:30: "A Night in Naples," a concert of tarantellas, love songs, and courtly dances performed by the flautist Paula Robison and friends. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

SUMMER OUTSIDE THE BIG TOP
On Sundays in Red Hook, Brooklyn, this month, lariat artists, acrobatic break-dancers, and other circus performers ply their trade aboard the Waterfront Museum & Showboat Barge, a historic 1914 Lehigh Valley Railroad barge that's owned by a former professional juggler. (Columbia Street Marine Terminal, 699 Columbia St. For more information, call 718-624-4719. Sundays at 1 and 4:30.) ♦ Circus Amok, the funky alternative troupe run by Jennifer Miller—a genuine bearded lady—is touring the city through June 22 with its latest politically charged show, "Home*Land*Security." (For details about showtimes and locations, visit www.circusamok.org.)

READINGS
June 11 at 7: The art historian Anne Reynolds reads from her new book, "Robert Smithson: Learning

from New Jersey." (Spoonbill & Sugartown Booksellers, 218 Bedford Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 16 at 7: Brooke Delaney and Sean Flaherty read from their poetry. (Junno's, 64 Downing St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 24 at 7:30: The Austrian actor Peter Hois offers a dramatic reading of "The Dream of the Bed" and "Vernissage, with Death's Head, Arm Bone and Rebirth," two one-act lyric narratives by the sculptor and writer Shannon Wardell. (Nuyorican Poets Café, 236 E. 3rd St. 212-505-8183.)

TALKS

June 11 at 7:30: Following a screening of "The Line King," a documentary about Al Hirschfeld, a group that includes Jules Feiffer, Sidney Lumet, and Marian Seldes gathers to discuss the illustrator's life and work. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 212-601-1000.) ♦ June 16 at 7: The *Nation* publisher, Victor Navasky, and the screenwriter Norma Barzman offer a program titled "From McCarthy to Ashcroft: The Blacklist Revisited." (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 212-229-5353.) ♦ June 17 at 8:15: Thirty years after the publication of Nancy Friday's "My Secret Garden," the writer Candace Bushnell ("Sex and the City"); the filmmaker Candida Royalle; Faye Wattleton, the president of the nonprofit advocacy group Center for Gender Equality; and others join Friday to talk about the present state of female sexuality. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

TABLES FOR TWO

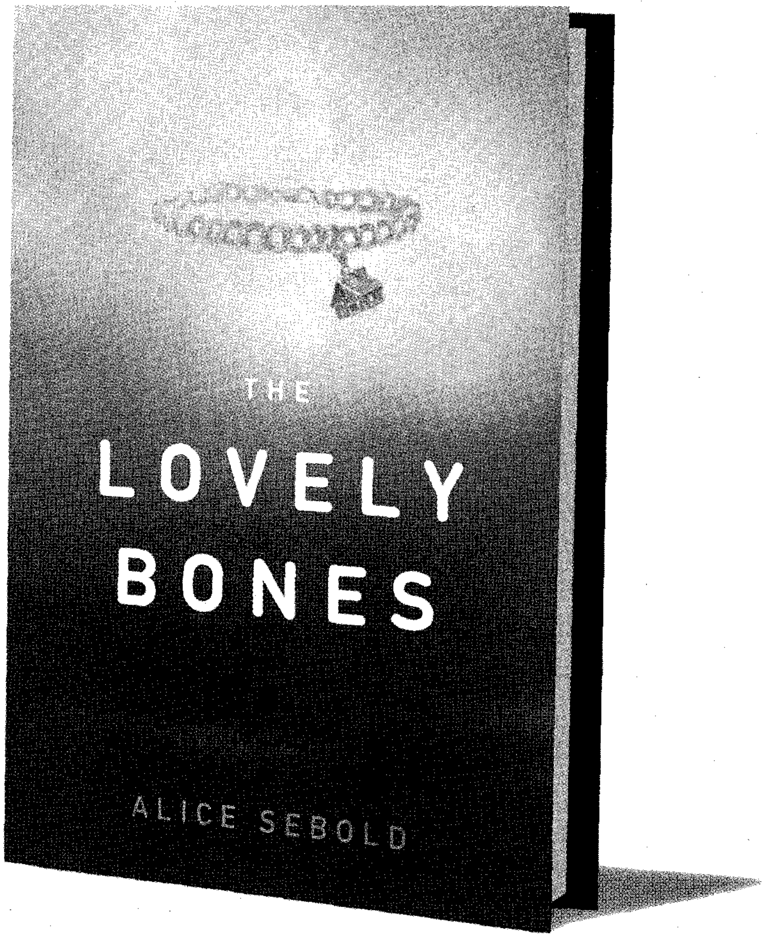
LOVELY DAY

196 Elizabeth St. (212-925-3310)—At an intimate little burrow on Elizabeth Street north of Spring, Kazusa Jibiki has reinvented the Thai noodle-and-dumpling shop in a space that feels like a diner in Pleasantville, Japan. Red-topped malt-shop tables and banquettes nestle around a bar with a marble soda-fountain countertop. A table lamp and a telephone sit at a corner of the bar, as if they were on an end table in a family room. Eating at Lovely Day is like having a picnic indoors, where, instead of lemonade, the drink in the cooler is an Asian mojito, made with crushed mint, brown palm sugar, fresh lime juice, and sake.

Jibiki came to New York from Japan a decade ago with an art-school background and an instinct for style. In 1993, while she was studying business at N.Y.U., contacts in Tokyo asked her to find a relatively unknown New York fashion designer and introduce him to Japan, and she chose Marc Jacobs. Her restaurant draws Jacobs' sort of people: lithe, quiet scenesters who blend well with the surroundings. The men look like cleaned-up members of the Strokes, the women have Pilates bodies, and both sexes wear graphic T-shirts, cropped cotton biker jackets, and cargo yoga pants. They eat her food—coconutty Bangkok curried noodles in soup, cabbage nori, and what the menu calls "Delicious Flank Steak" teriyaki or "Comfortable Dish" (sautéed vegetables with chicken and rice)—but they linger for the feng shui and dessert and tea. The best quirks of fusion show up in such Westernized sweets as the fried rice-crêpe rolls packed with hot banana, for dessert, or, from the brunch menu, the buttermilk pancakes with lime-palm syrup.

Jibiki, who has long, shag-cut, tea-dyed hair and a soft way of talking, works behind the counter or walks among the tables, looking like a patron who's helping out. As friends from the neighborhood saunter in for pad thai, she offers a cheek to kiss and starts mixing their drinks. "People think it's a noodle shop, but it's something else," she says. "It's just what you want to eat." (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $6.50-$12.)

—*Liesl Schillinger*



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MOVIES OPENING

ALEX & EMMA
A romantic comedy in which a writer (Luke Wilson) hires a stenographer (Kate Hudson) to help him finish his novel, which he must complete in thirty days. Directed by Rob Reiner. Opening June 20.

BONHOEFFER
Martin Doblmeier's documentary about the German theologian who challenged the Nazi Party. In English and German. Opening June 20. (Quad Cinema.)

DUMB AND DUMBERER: WHEN HARRY MET LLOYD
This prequel to the Farrelly brothers' comedy "Dumb and Dumber" follows the two mentally challenged best friends in high school circa 1986. Eric Christian Olsen and Derek Richardson play the leads. Troy Miller directed. Opening June 13.

FRIDAY NIGHT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening June 20. (Quad Cinema.)

THE HARD WORD
Guy Pearce, Damien Richardson, and Joel Edgerton play feuding, bank-robbing brothers in an Australian comedy written and directed by Scott Roberts. Also with Rachel Griffiths. Opening June 13.

THE HEART OF ME
An adaptation of Rosamond Lehmann's novel about a romantic triangle in aristocratic England in the nineteen-forties. With Helena Bonham Carter, Olivia Williams, and Paul Bettany. Directed by Thaddeus O'Sullivan. Opening June 13. (Angelika Film Center and Cinema 1.)

HOLLYWOOD HOMICIDE
In Ron Shelton's police drama, Harrison Ford and Josh Hartnett play a pair of L.A.P.D. detectives investigating corruption and murder in the rap-music industry. With Kurupt, Lena Olin, and Master P. Opening June 13.

THE HULK
A lab-experiment accident causes a geneticist (Eric Bana) to turn into a green monster whenever he gets angry, in an adaptation of the Marvel Comics series. With Jennifer Connelly and Nick Nolte. Directed by Ang Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"). Opening June 20.

Opening June 20, "Friday Night," directed by Claire Denis.

JET LAG
Danièle Thompson's romantic comedy, in which a businessman (Jean Reno) and a beautician (Juliette Binoche) get stuck in an airport together. In French. Opening June 13.

THE LEGEND OF SURIYOTHAI
An epic drama about a sixteenth-century Thai princess who must choose between the man she loves and her duty to wed a powerful nobleman. Written and directed by Prince Chatri Chalem Yukol, a member of the Thai royal family. In Thai. Opening June 20.

MANITO
The début feature film of the writer-director Eric Eason chronicles forty-eight hours in the life of a Washington Heights Latino family, in cinéma-vérité style. Opening June 13. (Quad Cinema.)

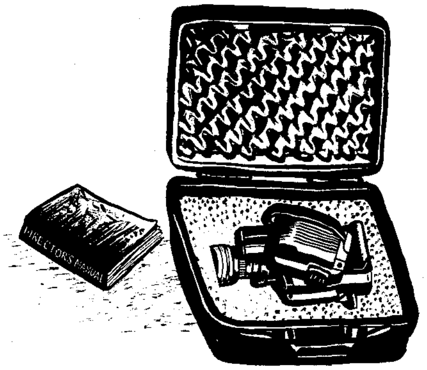
THE NAZI OFFICER'S WIFE
Liz Garbus's documentary portrait of Edith Hahn Beer, a Jewish woman who married a Nazi Party member in Munich during the Second World War. Opening June 13. (Pioneer.)

PISTOL OPERA
Assassins compete to be known as the number-one killer in this film by the Japanese director Seijun Suzuki, a sequel to his 1967 underground classic, "Branded to Kill." In Japanese. Opening June 13.

RUGRATS GO WILD!
The Rugrats get lost in the jungle, where they meet up with the Wild Thornberries, in an adventure story populated with characters from the two Nickelodeon television shows. Opening June 13.

STARKISS: CIRCUS GIRLS IN INDIA
A documentary about Nepalese children who are sold to travelling circus troupes by their parents. Chris Relleke and Jascha de Wilde directed. In English, Hindi, and Nepali. Opening June 11. (Film Forum.)

TYCOON: A NEW RUSSIAN
Pavel Lounguine wrote and directed this drama about the rise to power of a Russian oligarch (Vladimir Mashkov) in the turmoil that follows the fall of Communism. In Russian. Opening June 13. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)



DIVYA SRINIVASAN

FILM NOTES

L'AUBERGE ESPAGNOLE
The title of Cédric Klapisch's film means, in French slang, a free-for-all. This charming, utterly undramatic sketchbook movie is about a twenty-five-year-old Parisian graduate student, Xavier (Romain Duris), who goes to Spain as part of a European exchange program and lives with a polyglot mix of students in a cramped walkup apartment. The hero is instructed in lovemaking techniques by a lesbian roommate; he then has an affair with a luscious but vacuous married woman (Judith Godrèche). Not much happens, but the characters, searching for romance and good times, wander through Barcelona's handsome ochre streets, across the Gaudí pavilions and the sun-drenched piazzas; the movie is as much a love letter to the slowed-down erotic pleasures of the city as the New Wave films were to the endless social and intellectual enchantments of Paris. Shot with a lightweight digital camera, the movie, unimportant in itself, opens up possibilities for new, casual styles of filmmaking.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/19/03.) (Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, New York Twin, and Union Square.)

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM
A crowd-pleasing British movie devoted to the radical idea that girls can play soccer and sprain their ankles. Jess (Parminder Nagra) is a Sikh who hides her love of the game from her conservative parents, while Jules (Keira Knightley) is a tomboy who defies her English mother. Both have a thing for their Irish coach, Joe (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers)—he of the wounded knee and the watery eyes. The movie is a hodgepodge: nicely barbed scenes with Jess's family bump against weird practice montages that play like sports-bra ads. What it all adds up to is multicultural empowerment for the pre-teen shin-guard crowd.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

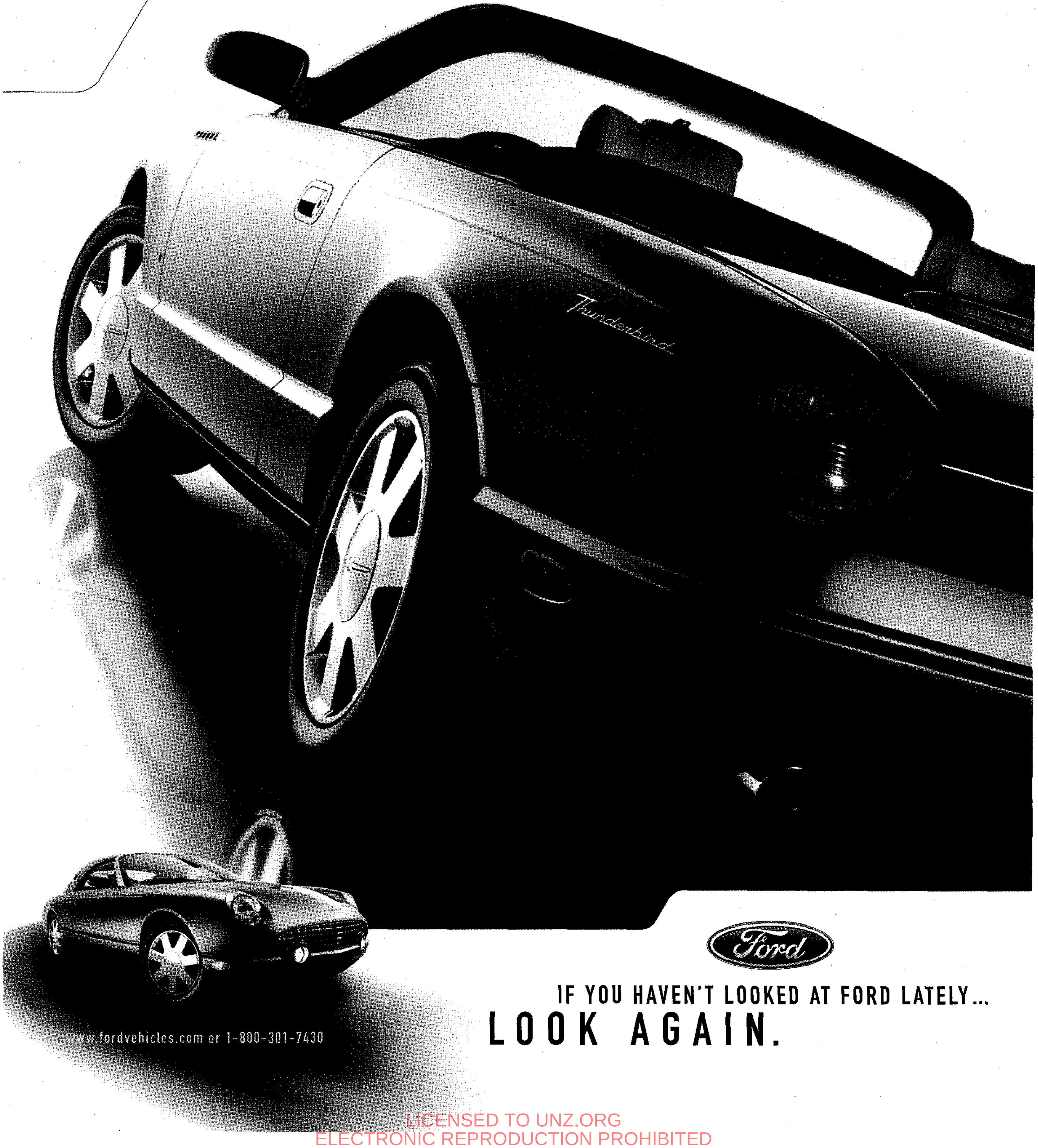
BRUCE ALMIGHTY
Jim Carrey as an all-powerful being? Please, God, no. In this underwhelming comedic parable, Carrey is the titular Bruce, a "wacky" Buffalo newscaster who is granted dominion over his home town by God (Morgan Freeman in a white suit). Half-baked comic conceits can sometimes be saved by inspired performances, but no one besides Carrey seems to be having much fun, and he's relying on his goofy faces again. The movie's subtext refers to Carrey's own career: his character uses his powers to become an anchor and do "serious news," but then decides that making people laugh is just as worthy. Fair enough, but the laughs never arrive. With Jennifer Aniston, who looks frightened most of the time.—*M.A.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS
Andrew Jarecki's startling documentary offers an approach to truth as richly nuanced but ultimately as futile as Kurosawa's great "Rashomon." In 1987, in Great Neck, Long Island, the police arrested a beloved retired schoolteacher, Arnold Friedman, and his son Jesse on the charge of sexually abusing the young boys who regularly gathered at the Friedman home for computer lessons. Jarecki interviews the police, the attorneys, the judge, and the alleged victims in the case, but the heart of the movie is the family's own footage: the layers of Friedman home movies and stills and the voluminous videos shot by David Friedman, the oldest Friedman boy, throughout the crisis. The two accused men were part of a loving family of five, although Mrs. Friedman, emotionally stranded by her husband, was not part of the jokes and the camaraderie. Before our astounded eyes the entire fantastic mess unfolds like a bloody Greek legend—the House of Atreus reincarnated in a middle-class Jewish family. Edited by Richard Hankin.—*D.D.* (6/2/03) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DOWN WITH LOVE
A lo-cal attempt at no-sex romantic comedy, a genre that was hardly substantial in the first place. Ewan McGregor plays Catcher Block, a writer for *Know*

AND THEY SAY CELL
PHONES ARE A DISTRACTION.

FORD THUNDERBIRD



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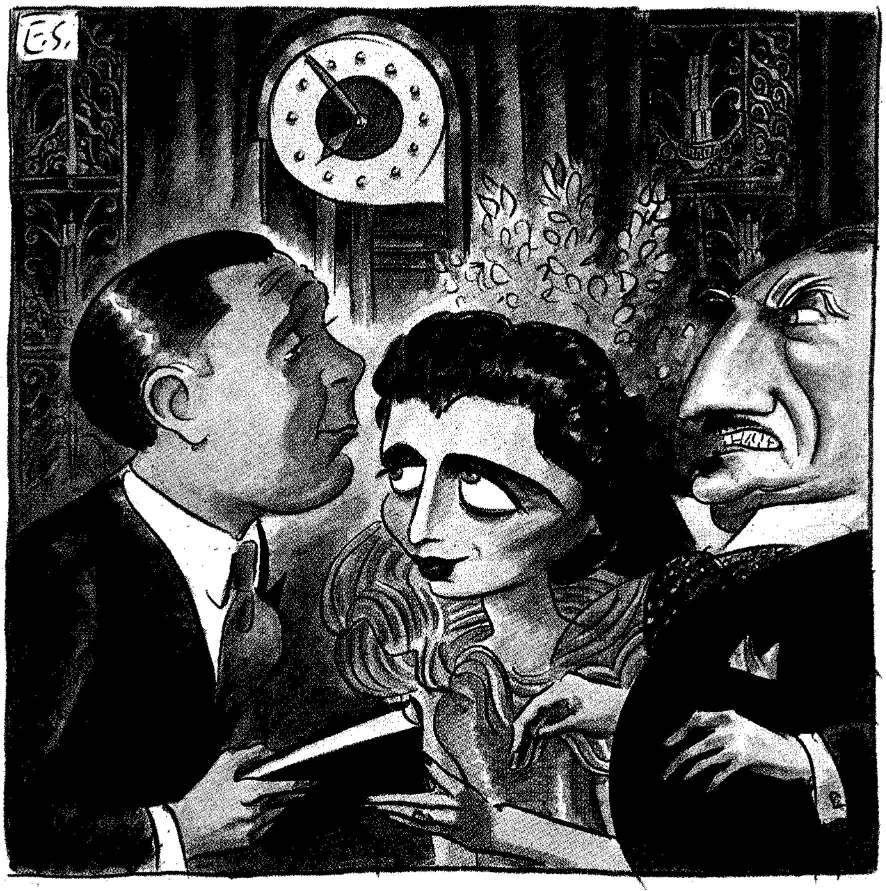
magazine in 1962. Renée Zellweger plays Barbara Novak, a mannequin lightly disguised as a best-selling author. The plot stitches them loosely together, as Catcher, the unreconstructed Lothario, tries to force Barbara, the scourge of soft hearts, to fall in love with him. It is hard to divine the purpose behind this pastiche: is the director, Peyton Reed, making sport of the innocent froth that passed for romance in a more innocent era, or is he aiming to revive it as a straight exercise in retro style? Can one simply drop an outdated genre into the laps of modern moviegoers and hope that it still works? The gags wander between the sweet and the unconsciously filthy, and the project's principal appeal will be to devotees of early-sixties hemlines. Indeed, given the blinding array of colors on show, the movie may be viewed most fruitfully under the influence of early-sixties pharmaceuticals. With David Hyde Pierce as Block's editor, who really *isn't* gay.—*Anthony Lane* (5/26/03) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 62nd & Broadway, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)



THE LUBITSCH TOUCH *A three-week retrospective of Ernst Lubitsch kicks off at Film Forum with a new print of his 1932 comedic gem, "Trouble in Paradise."*

ELLA FITZGERALD: SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

Charlotte Zwerin's elegant tribute to everyone's favorite swinging songstress offsets a swift and pungent rendering of Fitzgerald's triumph over personal catastrophes (a mean stepfather, a brutal reform-school stint, and unsuccessful romances and marriages) with a celebration of her ever-fresh and vital vocalizing. Those who know her only from her scintillating solo "songbook" series will thrill to her forays into bebop and her ability to make beautiful music with everyone from Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Frank Sinatra to Louis Armstrong and the trombonist Booty Wood.—*Michael Sragow* (Gramercy Theatre; June 12.)

THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS

Roman Polanski presages Mel Brooks, complete with a gay vampire who looks like a wrestling villain and a Jewish vampire who thumbs his nose at crucifixes, in this woefully unfunny cult satire from 1967. Polanski's Dracula, Count Von Krolock, is undead and not loving it, primarily because all he's been able to offer his flock recently is a single woodcutter. But now he has several live morsels in the offing, including an incompetent Van Helsing figure named Abronsius (Jack MacGowran)—not an absent-minded professor, exactly, but an all-too-easily distracted one—and his panic-prone assistant Alfred (Polanski himself). Sharon Tate is an eyeful as the Jewish vampire's daughter, but Polanski's direction, despite its surface elegance, is surprisingly inept. He dotes on the stylized sets, and he forgets to cue the audience as to whether it's dusk or dawn. He even muffs the brilliant visual punch line of the Count's triumphant ball, which involves an incongruously courtly dance, three humans, and a mirror.—*M.S.* (Moving Image; June 21.)

FINDING NEMO

The latest flood of wizardry from Pixar, whose productions, from "Toy Story" onward, have lent an indispensable vigor and wit to the sagging art of mainstream animation. Whether the new movie, directed by Andrew Stanton, will add much to that resuscitation is another matter. Albert Brooks provides the voice of Marlin, a non-amusing clown fish who sees his young son, Nemo, borne off in a diver's net. Not to be daunted, and plainly unfazed by the threat of both sharks and sentimentality, Marlin sets off to rescue his only child. You'll never guess how it ends. The technical skill on show is beyond question, but, as yet another computer-generated seascape ripples past, you may be tempted to ask whether that skill is driving the story; Marlin just drifts from one semi-heroic feat to the next, and the characters seldom get their hooks, or their jaws, into you with the pointed, snippy comedy that we have come to associate with Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Also, not to be impolite or anything, but how expressive is a fish, until it hits a grill? With the voices of Geoffrey Rush, Barry Humphries, Willem Dafoe, Allison Janney, and—the funniest of the shoal—Ellen DeGeneres.—*A.L.* (6/9/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

THE ITALIAN JOB

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE LAST BOLSHEVIK

A George Steiner aphorism near the beginning of the movie states, "It is not the literal past that rules us, but images of the past," and Chris Marker goes on to refine that idea in this extraordinary 1992 documentary about the obscure Soviet director Alexander Medvedkin, who hung on to Leninist ideals as he tried to ply a stirring, skeptical art under Stalinist eyes. "How did you survive all of that?" is the mystery the movie confronts as a narrator reads six letters addressed rhetorically to Medvedkin, who died in 1989. Marker puts voice-over narration and interviews into a jazzy, contrapuntal relation to his bold visual assemblies; his montage moves on waves of thought and feeling. In French.—*M.S.* (Anthology Film Archives; June 13 and June 15.)

LILYA 4-EVER

Lilya (Oksana Akinshina) is a chirpy girl of sixteen, sunk in a stagnant backwater of what used to be the Soviet Union. She is, to all intents and purposes, orphaned when her witch of a mother abandons her to seek a life in America. Lilya starts with practically nothing and goes downhill from there, winding up selling her body to the vulpine patrons of a bar; what redeems the movie—what renders a squalid experience quite sacred in its intensity—is the vehemence with which the writer and director, Lukas Moodysson, asks whether his heroine has also sold her soul. The caustic portrait that he paints of his native Sweden, to which the deluded Lilya is transported in her quest for a future, has brought him both outrage and acclaim; what is beyond doubt is the brio of his storytelling and the branding of the girl's misfortune onto our hearts and nerves. With Artiom Bogucharski as the artless dodger who becomes her only friend. In German, Swedish, English, and Russian.—*A.L.* (4/21 & 28/03) (Cinema Village.)

MAN ON THE TRAIN

The French director Patrice Leconte, having flitted from one genre to the next with movies as different as "Ridicule" and "The Girl on the Bridge," has now settled on his most consoling subject: the comedy of good companionship. Johnny Hallyday (who was, in his time, France's answer to Elvis) plays Milan, a low-level hit man who arrives, at the bluish end of a day, in a small French town and accepts the offer of a room from Manesquier (Jean Rochefort), a retired schoolteacher. For an hour, not much happens, and we are granted the languorous—and, to many filmgoers, increasingly rare—pleasure of watching two people lock gently together. They even trade roles: Rochefort, the most playful melancholic in cinema, learns to fire a gun, while Hallyday takes up pipe and slippers. All of this is delectable: Leconte has a taste for minor, chewed-up lives, and you can't help sighing with regret as he gathers his wits and hurries the plot toward an unnecessary climax. In French.—*A.L.* (5/12/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema 1, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE MATRIX RELOADED

Neo (Keanu Reeves), the One, fights a courtyard of replicant Agent Smiths (Hugo Weaving), who are all in black suits and ties, in what is perhaps the wittiest digital spectacle yet, and there's a bumper-cars-on-the-freeway episode that outdoes all such previous scenes. But most of this sequel, written and directed by the brothers Larry and Andy Wachowski, is heavy-spirited and pompous, even faintly embarrassing. At Zion, the city deep within the earth where the free humans live (all the others, trapped in the simulated reality of "the Matrix," are controlled by machines), a boring multiethnic saturnalia goes on forever. The movie has the portentous hollowness of so much bad sci-fi, in which the world is always about to end, but nothing else much matters, or makes any sense. The original, with its touch of the uncanny, has a special appeal for techno-geek teenagers and perhaps for certain intellectuals who feel trapped in a corporate-controlled culture that they are powerless to fight. Instead, they turn themselves into hip theoreticians of simulated reality, an idea no more interesting than the gaga psychedelic fantasies

EDWARD SOREL

THE amc PROJECT With The AMC Project, a collection of original films airing monthly on the network, AMC reveals unconventional, fresh perspectives on the evolving culture of Hollywood. Each installment of The AMC Project uncovers unexpected and provocative snapshots of this always colorful epicenter of *entertainment. To create the series, AMC put out an open call to filmmakers offering the chance* to delve into one of their most intriguing passion points about the industry. What each director discovered on their journey ultimately reveals Another Side of Hollywood.

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GAY HOLLYWOOD

PREMIERES MONDAY, AUGUST 11 AT 10PM

The town is supposedly ruled by the Velvet Mafia, yet being gay in Hollywood isn't always a power trip. In fact, it can still be a drag.

Filmmakers Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey wanted to see how today's gay men are making their mark in town. With more gay characters appearing on big and small screens, and gay *men and women wielding more power behind the camera, they wondered how life in the real gay Hollywood has changed.*

Gay Hollywood chronicles the experiences of five gay men trying to score their big breaks in screenwriting, acting, and fame.

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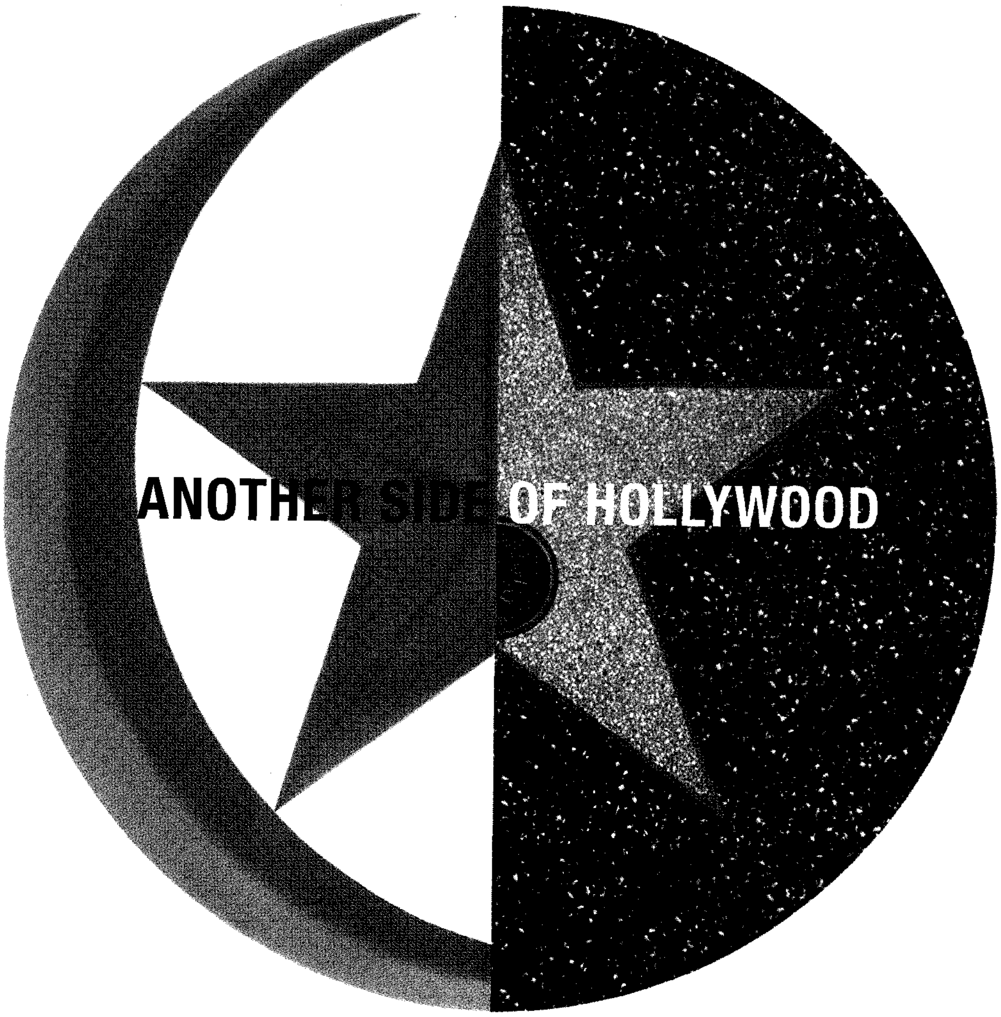

HOLLYWOOD AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

PREMIERES MONDAY, JULY 14 AT 10PM

How are "Friends" and J. Lo received in Cairo? Where does Al-Jazeera fall in the political spectrum of the Arab world? What themes are resonating with the independent film scene in Beirut? How does a young mother feel about the typical portrayal of Muslims in American films?

Hollywood and the Muslim World offers a contemporary Middle Eastern view of American entertainment. As satellite television erases traditional borders, the region struggles to integrate old ways with modern media. This film explores how a diverse group of Muslims see and experience the idea of America exported by Hollywood.

The insights offered reveal as much about America's cultural hegemony as it does about modern Islam.

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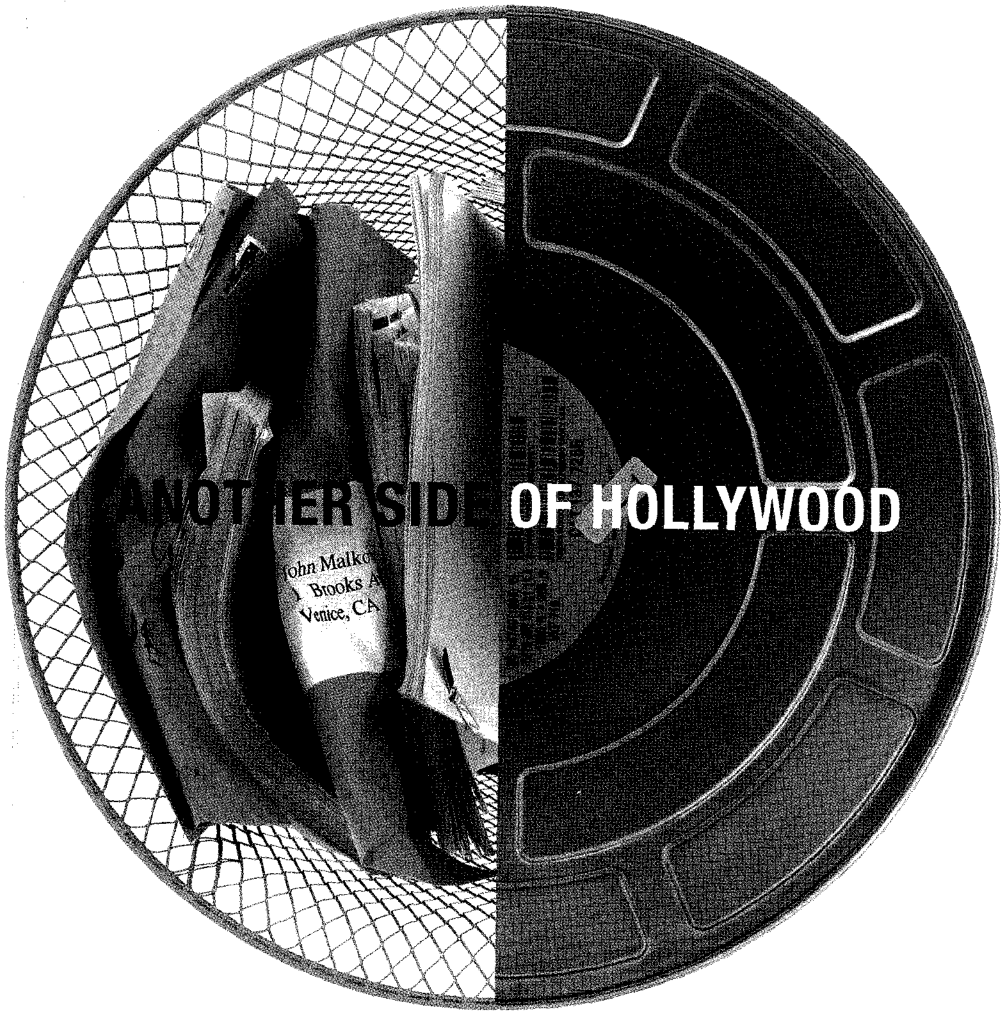

MALKOVICH'S MAIL

PREMIERES MONDAY, DECEMBER 8 AT 10PM

Every year, more than forty tons of screenplay pitch letters are dropped into the Hollywood in-box. With the chances of discovery next to nil, what outrageous gimmicks, sly deceptions, and all-out drama does it take to stand out in the slush pile?

Malkovich's Mail, a film by Lou Pepe and Keith Fulton who directed "Lost in La Mancha," opens up an intriguing collection of pitch letters crossing the desks of Mr. Mudd Productions. The reputation of John Malkovich, one of the partners at Mr. Mudd, attracts more than its share of unsolicited ideas from aspiring filmmakers from all walks of life.

Malkovich's Mail captures the stories behind a diverse group of scripts. And for a few lucky souls, Malkovich briefly screen-tests their treatments, bringing the characters to life personally.

TV FOR MOVIE PEOPLE amc

ANOTHER SIDE OF HOLLYWOOD
XXX
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I WANT TO BE CLIVE McLEAN

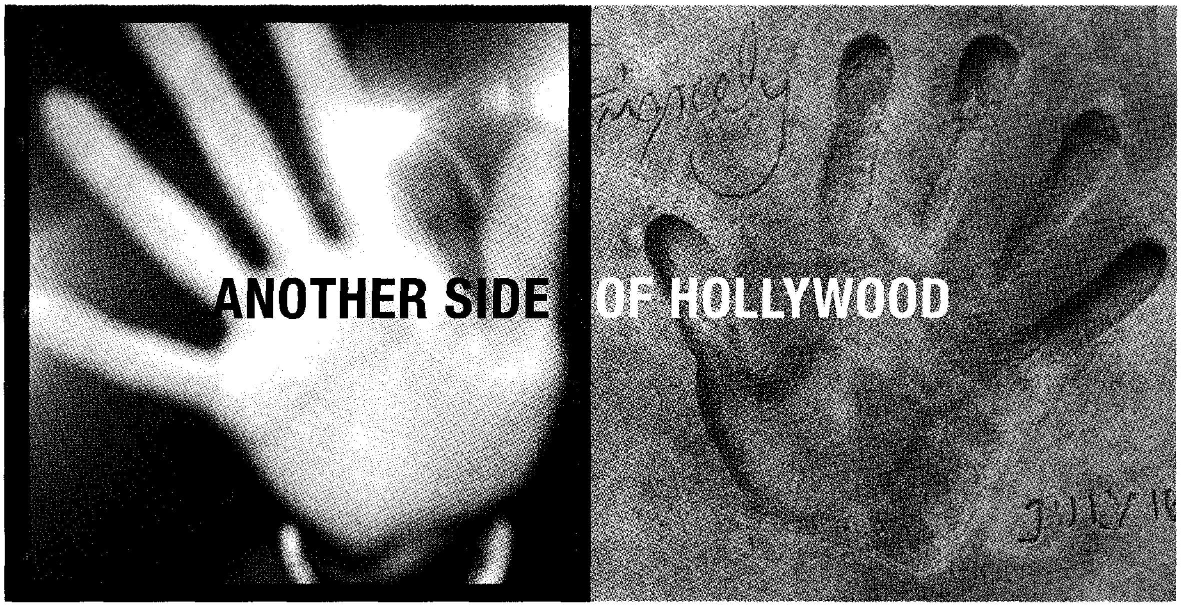
PREMIERES MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17 AT 10PM

What happens when an Ivy-league grad whose modest success in making films forces him to consider work in the porno trade to pay the bills? You'd expect him to make a tawdry exposé of a scurrilous industry. And you'd be wrong.

To land his first money shot, writer and director Peter Mattei sought a mentor. He considered an array of auteurs to emulate but knew he had something unique when he met Clive McLean, a gracious gentleman pornographer. Yes, a gentleman pornographer.

The skin trade discovered by Mattei—from a casting call to a romp in the hay at the McLean ranch—is remarkable for its overall ordinariness. "The people in this business just do their jobs," says Mattei. "They do them without apologies, without shame or guilt, and go home at night to their families."

TV FOR MOVIE PEOPLE amc



THE HOLLYWOOD HUNT CLUB

PREMIERES MONDAY, AUGUST 25 AT 10PM

Their snapshots of fame are beamed around the world, but the paparazzi have toiled in relative anonymity. Until now. Accustomed to scrutinizing the goings-on of celebrities, the paparazzi in **The Hollywood Hunt Club** emerge from behind the zoom lens revealing their unique spin on the people and phenomena they cover.

From a Winona shopping spree to a Britney club crawl to greeting Christina, Justin, and Keanu at LAX, The Hollywood Hunt Club tells the stories behind the candid photos that fill the tabloids. These aren't sordid tales about the stars, but the incredible lengths to which Hollywood's 24-hour corps of roving paparazzi will go in their efforts to outfox celebrities, and each other, to get the exclusive shot.

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THE **amc** PROJECT

ANOTHER SIDE OF HOLLYWOOD
STAR TRAILS

REALITY PEOPLE

PREMIERES MONDAY, JUNE 16 AT 10PM

How does intense exposure to instant fame transform the so-called normal people who populate the growing roster of reality programming? What happens sixteen minutes later when the cameras disappear and your old life feels totally foreign?

How the thousands of reality refugees fared in their return to real life fascinated directors Rick Velleu and Eddie Rosenstein. "We found that nobody goes back to their old lives," says Velleu. "It changes them." **Reality People** traces what happens post-reality to Tonya Paoni of "Big Brother 3," Chadwick Pelletier of "Road Rules Australia," and George Boswell of the original "Big Brother."

THE AMC PROJECT

ORIGINAL SERIES PREMIERE DATES

HOLLYWOOD AND THE MUSLIM WORLD	JULY 14 AT 10PM
GAY HOLLYWOOD	AUGUST 11 AT 10PM
THE HOLLYWOOD HUNT CLUB	AUGUST 25 AT 10PM
I WANT TO BE CLIVE McLEAN	NOVEMBER 17 AT 10PM
MALKOVICH'S MAIL	DECEMBER 8 AT 10PM

Dates and times subject to change.

TV FOR MOVIE PEOPLE **amc**

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of the sixties era.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

SPELLBOUND
Jeffrey Blitz's charming documentary follows eight elementary students competing in the 1999 National Spelling Bee; he rode the bus to school with them, interviewed their teachers, checked out their rooms, and, in one case, listened while a kid talked like a robot. The sample of children is appropriately diverse—in region, in race, in the intensity of their preparations. Some of their parents see the spelling bee as representing the immigrant dream of America in miniature, while others seem amazed at the intensity of their nerdy offspring. The competitions are tense, and Blitz cobbles together a series of heartbreaking reaction shots of errant spellers. His direction shows a clever, occasionally flippant selection of detail—the dog-eared unabridged dictionaries, the congratulatory sign posted outside Hooters, the prodigy who signs his autographs "Trust in Jesus."—*M.A.* (Cinema 2, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Quad Cinema.)

TROUBLE IN PARADISE
Perhaps the most shimmering of the romantic-comedy collaborations of the director Ernst Lubitsch and the writer Samson Raphaelson, this 1932 film is a make-believe world of the thirties preserved intact. Herbert Marshall is so adept at the silky tricks written into his lines that he creates a hushed atmosphere. He plays a career jewel thief and, as his partner, Miriam Hopkins, quick and darting, always has her feelers out, along with her kittenish claws. These two are accomplished seducers, and in this movie witty seduction is indistinguishable from love itself. Kay Francis is the wealthy widow whose face takes on a yearning expression once she sees Marshall; desire makes her warm and languid. The movie is full of suave maneuvers and magical switcheroos; in its light-as-a-feather way, it's perfection. With Charles Ruggles, Edward Everett Horton, C. Aubrey Smith, Robert Greig, Leonid Kinskey, Luis Alberni, Nella Walker, and Tyler Brooke as the singing Venetian garbageman.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; June 13-19.)

WINGED MIGRATION
The French filmmaker Jacques Perrin shows us things we have never seen before: the alien world of insects in "Microcosmos" and, now, migrating birds in all their airborne glory. Perrin and his team of camera operators employ remote-control gliders and balloons to astonishing effect—the camera literally flies alongside the birds as they wing their way north and south in their search for food. They capture some amazing solo efforts, like the common murre who plunges off a ten-story seaside cliff, as well as the beauty of numbers, as in the scene of an entire flock of white-faced whistling ducks, all turning their heads at once. The images are mostly left alone, with minimal dialogue and endurable New Age music. Bird-lovers will be in heaven, and the less ornithologically inclined will be surprised to learn that some Canada geese don't hang around golf courses all winter. Among the more unforgettable birds on display is the Clark's grebe, which can pull off the cool trick of walking on water.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Paris, and Union Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE DANCER UPSTAIRS (5/5/03)
Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema Village, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Kew Gardens Cinema.

A MIGHTY WIND (5/5/03)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.

NOWHERE IN AFRICA
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, and 59th Street East Cinema.

TOGETHER
Lincoln Plaza and Sunshine Cinema.

2 FAST 2 FURIOUS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.

X2 (5/12/03)
Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (212-334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

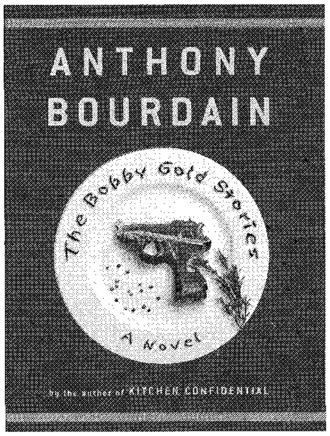
REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through June 29: "Dark Dreams, Dangerous Places: The Cinema of Roman Polanski." June 14 at 2: "Two Men and a Wardrobe" (1958; in Polish) and other short films. ♦ June 14 at 4: "Knife in the Water" (1962; in Polish). ♦ June 15 at 2: "Repulsion" (1965). ♦ June 15 at 4: "Cul-de-Sac" (1966). ♦ June 21 at 2: "The Fearless Vampire Killers" (†). ♦ June 21 at 4: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968). ♦ June 22 at 1:30: "Macbeth" (1971). ♦ June 22 at 4:15: "What?" (1973). ♦ Repertory nights. June 14-15 at 6:30: "Weekend" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ June 21-22 at 6:30: "Wings of Desire" (1988, Wim Wenders; in German, English, and French).

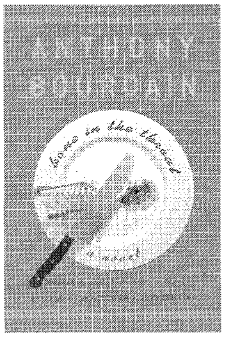
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Through June 15: A Chris Marker retrospective. All films are in French. June 11 at 7:30 and June 14 at 3:30: "A Grin Without a Cat" (1977-93). ♦ June 12 at 7 and 9:30 and June 14 at 9: "Sans Soleil" (1982). ♦

BOURDAIN'S CRIME FICTION KICKS ASS

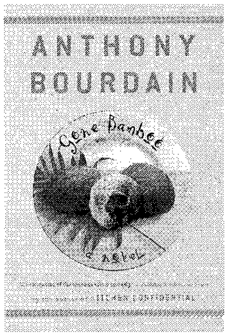


Praise for *The Bobby Gold Stories*:
"In his third novel, Bourdain whips up a Manhattan tale with Elmmore Leonard flavor: the bad guys are a little good, the good guys are a little bad, and everybody's a little funny."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

ALSO AVAILABLE, IN PAPERBACK:



Praise for *Bone in the Throat*:
"An irresistible novel." —*Booklist*



Praise for *Gone Bamboo*:
"Bourdain's prose is utterly riveting, swaggering with stylish machismo." —*New York* magazine

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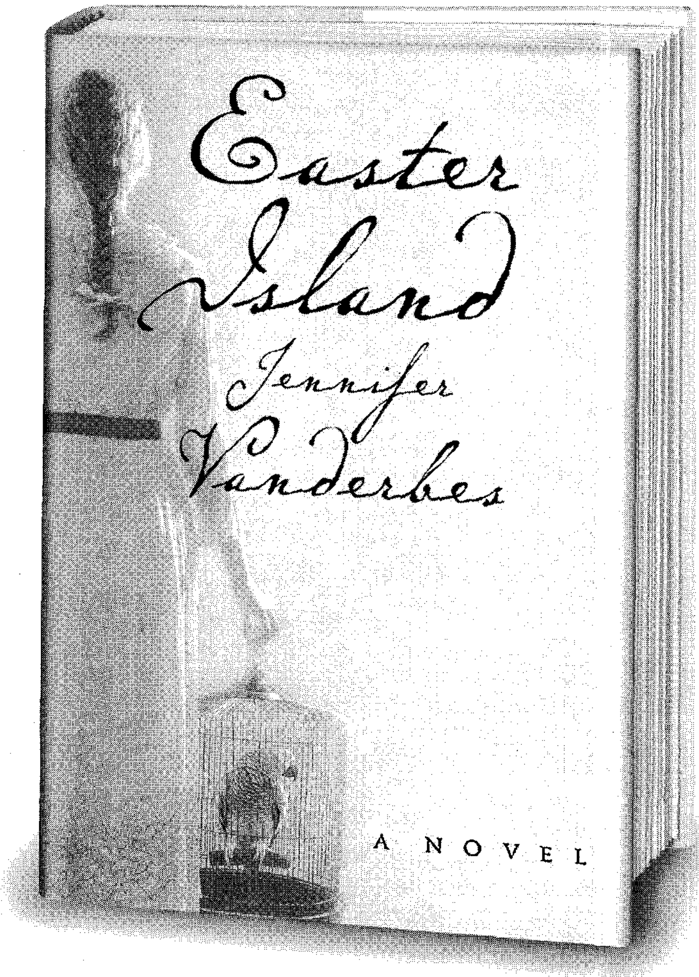

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June 13 at 7 and June 15 at 9: "The Last Bolshevik" (†). ♦ June 13 at 9:30 and June 15 at 7: "One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich" (1999). ♦ June 14 at 7 and June 15 at 5: Rare videos by Marker (1985-93). ♦ Starting June 19: A restored print of John Cassavetes's "Shadows" (1959). June 19-20 and June 23-24 at 7 and 9 and June 21-22 at 5, 7, and 9.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Through June 30: "Village Voice: Best of 2002." June 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Last Orders" (2002, Fred Schepsi). ♦ June 12 at 4 and 8: "Esther Kahn" (2000, Arnaud Desplechin). ♦ June 13 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "24 Hour Party People" (2002, Michael Winterbottom). ♦ June 14 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Camel(s)" (2002, Park Kiyong; in Korean). ♦ June 15 at 3, 6, and 9: "Spirited Away" (2002, Hayao Miyazaki; in Japanese). ♦ June 16 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Princess Mononoke" (1997, Miyazaki; in Japanese). ♦ June 17 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Bloody Sunday" (2002, Paul Greengrass). ♦ June 19 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Time Out" (2001, Laurent Cantet; in French). ♦ June 20 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "I'm Going Home" (2001, Manoel de Oliveira; in French). ♦ June 21 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Uncertainty Principle" (2002, de Oliveira; in Portuguese). ♦ June 22 at 2, 3:30, 5, 6:30, 8, and 9:30: "Oporto of My Childhood" (2001, de Oliveira; in Portuguese). ♦ June 23 at 4:30 and 7: "Punch-Drunk Love" (2002, Paul Thomas Anderson). ♦ June 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Éloge de l'Amour" (2001, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—June 11-12 at 1:20, 4:40, and 8: "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (1967, Sergio Leone). ♦ Through July 3: "The Lubitsch Touch," a three-week retrospective of the German director's career. June 13-15 at 2, 3:40, 5:20, 7, 8:40, and 10:20 and June 16-19 at 2, 3:40, and 5:20: "Trouble in Paradise" (†). ♦ June 16 at 7: "So This Is Paris" (1926) and "Lady Windermere's Fan" (1925). ♦ June 17 at 7: "The Oyster Princess" (1919) and "Carmen" (1918). ♦ June 18 at 7: "The Man I Killed" (1931) and "Eternal Love" (1929). ♦ June 19 at 7: "The Mountain Cat" (1921) and "Madame DuBarry" (1919). ♦ June 20-21 at 1, 5:10, and 9:20: "Ninotchka" (1939). ♦ June 20-21 at 3:10 and 7:20: "Cluny Brown" (1946). ♦ June 22 at 1:05, 5:05, and 8:55 and June 23-24 at 1:05 and 5:05: "Heaven Can Wait" (1943). ♦ June 22 at 3:15 and 7:10 and June 23-24 at 3:15: "If I Had a Million" (1932). ♦ Rare Lubitsch films from the Munich Filmmuseum. June 23 at 7:15: "The Doll" (1919). ♦ June 23 at 9:15: "Angel" (1937). ♦ June 24 at 7:15: "Kohlhiesel's Daughter" (1920). ♦ June 24 at 9:20: "Loves of Pharoah" (1922).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-315-6160)—Through June 24: Joan of Arc movies. June 17 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Jeanne la Pucelle II. Les Prisons" (1994, Jacques Rivette; in French). ♦ June 24 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Saint Joan" (1957, Otto Preminger).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through June 12: The documentary films of Charlotte Zwerin. June 12 at 2: "Salesman" (1969; with the Maysles brothers). ♦ June 12 at 4: "Gimme Shelter" (1970; with the Maysles brothers). ♦ June 12 at 8:15: "Ella Fitzgerald: Something to Live For" (†). ♦ Starting June 13: "To Save and Project," restored and preserved films. June 13 at 2 and June 14 at 1: "Dos and Don'ts: The Films of Richard Massingham" (1933-1950). ♦ June 13 at 4:30 and June 19 at 6:30: "Jerry the Troublesome Tyke" cartoons (1925-26) and "Stage Struck" (1925, Allan Dwan). ♦ June 13 at 6:30 and June 19 at 4:30: "The Lady Without Camelias" (1953, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). ♦ June 13 at 8:45 and June 19 at 2: "The Model Shop" (1968, Jacques Demy). ♦ June 14 at 4 and June 20 at 6: Three films by Stan Brakhage (1959-1986). ♦ June 14 at 6:30: "The Burglar" (1957, Paul Wendkos). ♦ June 14 at 8:30 and June 20 at 4:30: "À la Conquête du Pôle" (1912, George Méliès) and "The Man from Planet X" (1951, Edgar G. Ulmer). ♦ June 15 at 1 and June 16 at 6: Hungarian commercials from the nineteen-thirties and "The Thaw" (1931, Boris Barnet). ♦ June 15 at 4 and June

19 at 8:30: "City Without Jews" (1924, Hans Karl Breslauer) and "Our Time in the Garden" (1981, Ron Blau). ♦ June 15 at 6:30 and June 20 at 2: "Teen Kanya" (1961, Satyajit Ray; in Bengali). ♦ June 16 at 7:45 and June 21 at 1: "Nana" (1926, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ June 20 at 8:30: "The Rite of Spring" (1963, Manoel de Oliveira; in Portuguese). ♦ June 22 at 1: "The Red Pony" (1949, Lewis Milestone). ♦ June 23 at 6:30: Austrian avant-garde films of the nineteen-sixties. ♦ June 23 at 8: American experimental films from the Oesterreichisches Filmmuseum (1963-84). ♦ June 21-22: Selections from the Robert Flaherty film seminar. June 21 at 3:30: "Baked Alaska" (2002, Franny Armstrong) and "McLibel: Two Worlds Collide" (1997, Armstrong). ♦ June 21 at 5:30: "The Story of Kindness; or, How to Behave" (1987, Tran Van Thuy; in Vietnamese). ♦ June 21 at 8: "Story from the Corner of a Park" (1996, Van Thuy; in Vietnamese). ♦ June 22 at 3: "Minamata: The Victims and Their World" (1971, Tsuchimoto Noriaki; in Japanese). ♦ June 22 at 6: "August" (2002, Avi Mograbi; in Hebrew).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

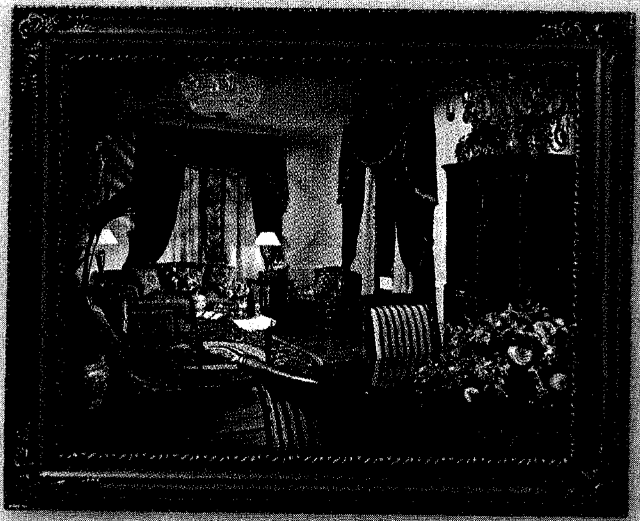
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. June 13-14: "Baise-Moi" (2000, Coralie and Virginie Despentes; in French). ♦ June 20-21: "Rushmore" (1998, Wes Anderson).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through July 13: Sci-Fi Flick Fest. June 14 at 2 and June 15 at 8: "This Island Earth" (1955, Joseph Newman). ♦ June 14 at 3:45 and June 15 at 9:45: "THX 1138" (1971, George Lucas). ♦ June 14 at 6 and June 15 at 2: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1980, Steven Spielberg). ♦ June 14 at 8:30 and June 15 at 4:30: "Contact" (1997, Robert Zemeckis). ♦ June 21 at 2 and June 22 at 7:15: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ June 21 at 3:45 and June 22 at 9: "A Clockwork Orange" (1971, Kubrick). ♦ June 21 at 7 and June 22 at 2: "Johnny Mnemonic" (1995, Robert Longo). ♦ June 21 at 9 and June 22 at 4: "The Matrix" (1999, Larry and Andy Wachowski).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through June 12: "Open Roads: New Italian Cinema." All films are in Italian. June 11 at 1: "Casomai" (2002, Alessandro D'Alatri). ♦ June 12 at 1:30: "The Adventures of Pinocchio" (1971, Luigi Comencini). ♦ June 12 at 4:15: "Soul Mate" (2002, Sergio Rubini). ♦ Starting June 13: The Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. June 13-14 at 2 and June 15 and June 17 at 9:15: "Pinochet's Children" (2002, Paula Rodriguez; in Spanish). ♦ June 13 at 4, June 15 at 1:45, and June 17 at 7: "I'm Taraneh, 15" (2002, Rassul Sadr-Ameli; in Farsi). ♦ June 13 at 6:30 and June 15-16 at 4: "Welcome to Hadassah Hospital" (2002, Ramón Gieling; in Hebrew and English). ♦ June 13 at 9:15, June 15 at 6:45, June 17 at 4:30, and June 20 at 1:30: "Rana's Wedding" (2002, Hany Abu-Assad; in Arabic). ♦ June 14 at 4, June 16 at 6:45, and June 17 at 2: "The Last Just Man" (2001, Steven Silver; in English, French, and Kinyarwanda). ♦ June 14 at 6:30: "Madame Staa" (2003, Karim Ainouz; in Portuguese). ♦ June 14 at 9:15 and June 16 at 9: "Ford Transit" (2002, Abu-Assad; in Arabic). ♦ June 16 at 1, June 18 at 6:15, and June 19 at 1: "Dweepa" (2002, Girish Kasaravalli; in Kannada). ♦ June 18 at 1 and June 19 and June 23 at 6:30: "State of Denial" (2002, Elaine Epstein). ♦ June 18 at 3:30, June 19 at 9, and June 20 at 4: "Jiyan/Life" (2002, Jano Rosebiani; in Kurdish). ♦ June 18 at 9, June 19 at 4, and June 20 at 6:30: "The Flute Player" (2003, Jocelyn Glatzer; in English and Khmer). ♦ June 20 and June 22 at 9: "Balseros" (2002, Carlos Bosch and Josep M. Domenech; in English and Spanish). ♦ June 21 at 1 and June 24 at 2: "Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?" (2002, Anne Aghion; in Kinyarwanda). ♦ June 21 at 4:30: "Life on the Tracks" (2002, Ditsi Carolino; in Pilipino). ♦ June 21 at 7: "The Cuckoo" (2002, Alexander Rogozhkin; in Russian, Finnish, and Sami). ♦ June 21 and June 23 at 9: "My Terrorist" (2002, Yulie Cohen Gertsel; in Hebrew). ♦ June 22-23 at 1: "Kaddim Wind" (2002, David Benchetrit; in Hebrew). ♦ June 22 at 6:30: "American Dissent: A Special Program of Newsreel Films on Their Thirty-Fifth Anniversary."



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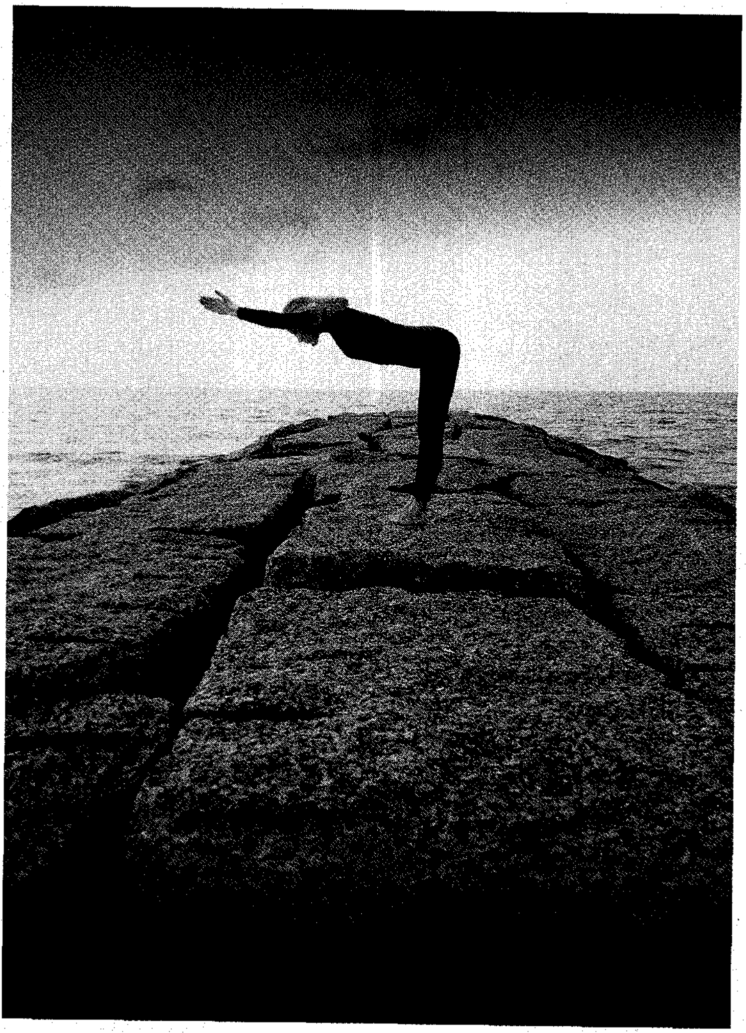

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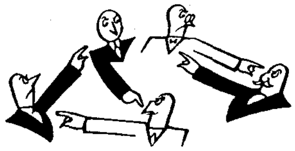
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

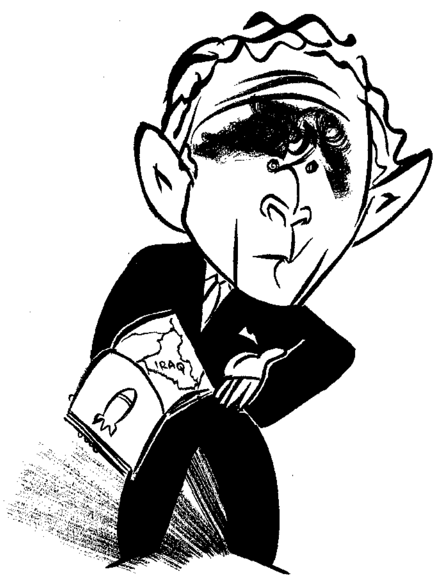
COMMENT
MIGHT AND RIGHT



Two weeks ago, on the first day of his first foreign trip since the fall of Baghdad, President Bush went to Auschwitz. The symbolism could not have been more heavy-handed: with the international press full of images of the grisly excavations of Saddam Hussein's killing fields, the President claimed the memory of the six million to explain his "war on terror," invoking the Nazi gas chambers and crematoriums as "a sobering reminder of the power of evil and the need for people to resist evil." Bush ended his trip in the same spirit, telling a cheering throng of American troops in Qatar, "The world is now learning what many of you have seen. They're learning about the mass graves. They're learning about the torture chambers. Because of you, a great evil has been ended." It's true that stopping Saddam's tyranny is the most heartening and unambiguous consequence of the war in Iraq. But Bush did not take over that country on a humanitarian impulse. As Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has said, although Saddam's "criminal treatment of the Iraqi people" was a "fundamental concern" for Washington's war planners, it was "not a reason to put American kids' lives at risk, certainly not on the scale we did it." Rather, according to the repeated claims of the Administration, our kids were put at risk in order to disarm Iraq of its chemical and biological weapons, which, intelligence assessments were said to show, posed an urgent threat to our national security.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

So where is Saddam's terrible arsenal? Bush, on his way to Auschwitz, took time out to tell Polish television, "We found the weapons of mass destruction." That wasn't true. After more than two months of searching, American forces in Iraq had yet to discover any trace of biological or chemical agents. All they have found is a pair of tractor trailers, which appear to have been fitted out as weapons laboratories but never used. The President's readiness to present this discovery as a finding of the weapons themselves follows a pattern of distortions on the part of the Administration—hypotheticals proclaimed as facts, suspicions and fears spun as clear and present dangers, actions taken accordingly—throughout the planning, marketing, and prosecution of the war.



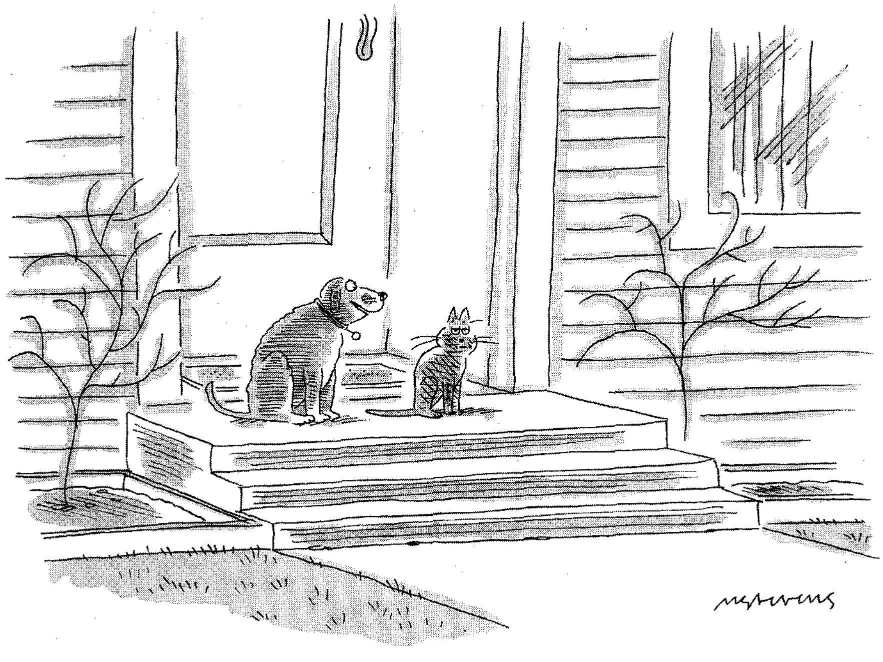
Why, exactly, are we in Iraq? Regardless of whether one supported or opposed the war, one cannot escape the impression that the weapons, some of which may yet be found, were a pretext for a campaign whose larger motives and purposes the Administration has never seen fit to articulate to the public. As the war drags on, a sense of reality is lacking in the Bush camp's triumphalism; Americans are still killing and dying in almost every news cycle, and Iraqi resentment is mounting against an improvised occupation that has set the nation free mainly in the sense that it is ungoverned. Against this background, the charges now circulating that Bush's war cabinet depended on false or, worse, falsified intelligence to exaggerate the threat of those weapons in the first place is much more than a technicality.

The press reports are damning. The Washington *Post* quotes C.I.A. analysts complaining that they felt steady pressure from Vice-President Dick Cheney, from Wolfowitz, and from their own boss, George Tenet, to amplify the danger of Iraq. The *Times* has picked up the thread of reporting in this magazine by Seymour M. Hersh about the Pentagon's creation of its own intelligence organ, with the apparent purpose of producing the sort of allegations about Iraqi weapons and links to terrorists that C.I.A. analysts would not supply. *U.S. News & World Report* describes how Secretary of State Colin Powell, before he made the Administration's case against Iraq to the United Nations Security Council, rejected as weak and insubstantial intelligence material prepared for him by Cheney's office. At one point, Powell reportedly threw the Vice-President's pages in the air and said, "I'm not reading this. This is bullshit." The historical precedent that these reëxaminations suggest is not, as the President would prefer, the Second World War but the Tonkin Gulf affair of 1964, when an alarmist report of an unconfirmed attack against an American warship in the South China Sea served Lyndon Johnson's White House as a pretext for an escalation of the Vietnam War.

Meanwhile, in London, Prime Minister Tony Blair is facing the fury of both sides of the aisle in Parliament over his claim before the war that he had intelligence showing that Saddam's chemical agents were weaponized and could be deployed at just forty-five minutes' notice. "It is about the gravest accusation that can be made in politics," the *Daily Telegraph*, which strongly supported the war, wrote. "Blair stands charged, in effect, with committing British troops on the basis of a lie." Both the Prime Minister and the President have indignantly dismissed the suggestion that they hyped—or, as the British put it, "sexed up"—the case for war, and both have said that with a bit more time the truth will out. In London, the outing will be done by Parliament, which has compelled Blair to submit to a full inquiry into the use and possible abuse of intelligence reporting in the buildup to the war. Americans should be prepared for a similar investigation, if Congress can muster the courage and the clarity to command it. Because Bush launched his reëlection campaign shortly after the marines pulled down Saddam's statue in Baghdad, any public excavation of the Administration's drive to war is bound to be fraught with partisan politics. But, in a country where the previous President's lies about consensual adulterous relations were considered ground for impeachment, truthtelling about the gravest affair of state—the waging of war—must stand as a paramount value.

A few days after Bush toured Auschwitz, the Pew Research Center released a survey of international opinion, canvassed from some twenty countries, which found that "the war has widened the rift between Americans and Western Europeans, further inflamed the Muslim world, softened support for the war on terrorism, and significantly weakened global public support for the pillars of the post-World War II era—the U.N. and the North Atlantic alliance." And the war in Iraq is far from over. What is at stake there, and in the war against terrorism of which it is but a chapter, is the nature of America's standing as the defining power of our age. We are told that we went into Iraq to make the world safer, yet, even as the remaining members of Bush's axis of evil, Iran and North Korea, pursue nuclear-arms programs, many of the countries that allied with us against Saddam are wondering if they were falsely led. Nobody can regret that Saddam is gone. But, in the unipolar world that the Bush Administration seems bent on forging, our security will depend as much on our credibility as on our physical might.

—*Philip Gourevitch*



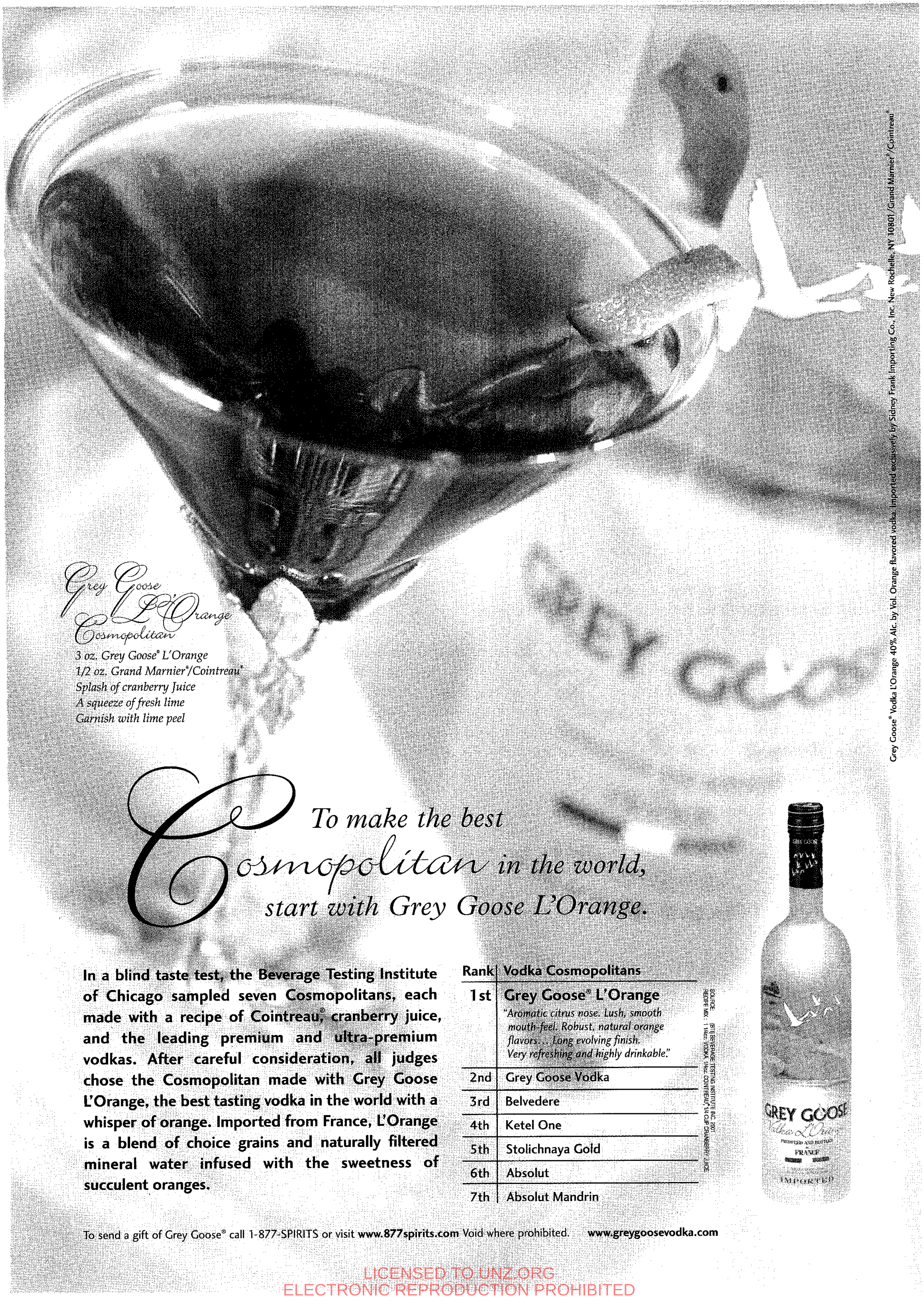
"I like to think of myself as a vital link in the homeland-security system."

DEPT. OF PHARMACOLOGY
LITTLE HELPER

Where would we be without Valium? Certainly not in Nutley, New Jersey, savoring the soft Klonopin light of a warm spring day. Nutley, ten minutes west of the Lincoln Tunnel, is home to the corporate campus of the Roche pharmaceutical company, which a couple of weeks ago threw a birthday party for Valium and its inventor, Dr. Leo Sternbach. Valium was turning forty; Sternbach, ninety-five. Both are diminished but are still going strong.

It was a noonday affair—very relaxed—populated mainly by employees of Roche, who owe their livelihood, if not their sense of well-being, to the Doc, as he's sometimes called. They gathered in the lobby of building No. 76, beneath a mezzanine hung with banners advertising the young turks, such as Fuzeon, Pegasys, Xeloda—reminders of what the benzo billions have made possible. There were balloons, and a message board for employees to sign ("Leo, Thanks for the happiness and relaxation you have given us over the years"). The capper was the cake, a giant, three-tiered ziggurat topped off by a trio of oversized pills, each with the trademark "V" in its center. One was light blue, one yellow, one white (10 mg., 5 mg., 2 mg.). "Happy Birthday Valium and Dr. Sternbach" was etched in the cake, and you half-expected a deranged Patty Duke to spring out of it screeching, "Having *fun*, kiddies?" Sadly, neither the cake nor the pills were real, though genuine cake and ice cream were on offer a few paces away. Employees ambled around with little paper plates.

Before long, the Doc himself arrived,



Grey Goose L'Orange Cosmopolitan

3 oz. Grey Goose® L'Orange
1/2 oz. Grand Marnier®/Cointreau®
Splash of cranberry Juice
A squeeze of fresh lime
Garnish with lime peel

To make the best Cosmopolitan in the world, start with Grey Goose L'Orange.

In a blind taste test, the Beverage Testing Institute of Chicago sampled seven Cosmopolitans, each made with a recipe of Cointreau,® cranberry juice, and the leading premium and ultra-premium vodkas. After careful consideration, all judges chose the Cosmopolitan made with Grey Goose L'Orange, the best tasting vodka in the world with a whisper of orange. Imported from France, L'Orange is a blend of choice grains and naturally filtered mineral water infused with the sweetness of succulent oranges.

Rank	Vodka Cosmopolitans
1st	**Grey Goose® L'Orange** *"Aromatic citrus nose. Lush, smooth mouth-feel. Robust, natural orange flavors... Long evolving finish. Very refreshing and highly drinkable."*
2nd	Grey Goose Vodka
3rd	Belvedere
4th	Ketel One
5th	Stolichnaya Gold
6th	Absolut
7th	Absolut Mandrin

SOURCE: (BTI) BEVERAGE TESTING INSTITUTE INC. 2001
RECIPE MIX: 1 1/4oz. VODKA, 1/4oz. COINTREAU,® 1/4 CUP CRANBERRY JUICE

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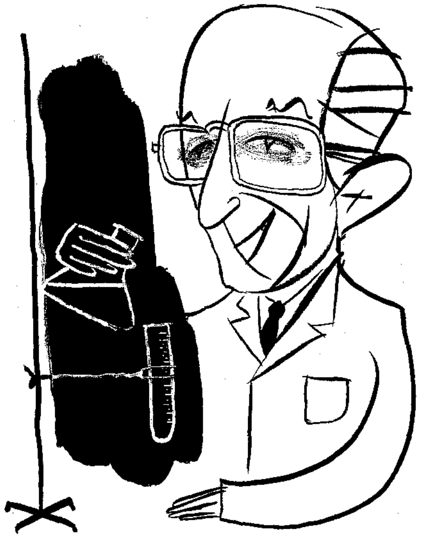
stooped but beaming. He was bald and big-eared, with boxy glasses. He carried a cane and wore brown walking shoes with Velcro straps. He was led into an auditorium for a little tribute: executive testimonials (“an innovator’s innovator”), the unveiling of a framed print (Leo through the years), standing ovations (dust careening in the stage lights), and a video (family snapshots and lab stills, accompanied by Dylan doing “Forever Young”).

The employees know the Leo legend. Born in what is now Croatia and educated in Kraków, Sternbach learned chemistry from his father, a Polish pharmacist. In 1937, he moved to Switzerland, and went to work as a chemist for Roche, but was transferred, in 1941, to New Jersey, to a new lab in Nutley. In 1957, searching for a tranquillizer that wasn’t as debilitating as Miltown, the best available at the time, Sternbach dusted off an old chemical compound that he’d experimented with in Kraków—a seven-membered ring structure, if you must know—and came up with Librium, the first benzodiazepine. It passed the “cat test”; that is, lab cats that had been dosed hung limp when lifted by the nape of the neck. It also passed the Leo test—he tried it, on the sly, and felt “sleepy.” Two years later, he tweaked it to create Valium (generic name: diazepam), which, when it went on the market, in 1963, quickly became the first real blockbuster drug, the Prozac of its day. Between 1969 and 1982, it was the most heavily prescribed drug in America, nearly as ubiquitous in medicine cabinets as shaving cream or aspirin. (Even the Bradys, those exemplars of clean living, apparently kept it handy: in the pilot for “The Brady Bunch,” in 1969, Carol tells Mike to take a tranquillizer to counteract prenuptial jitters. “I took one,” he says, and she responds, “Maybe you should take another one.”) Part of Valium’s appeal was that, unless it was mixed with other things, Elvis style, it was non-toxic, as Robert McFarlane, Reagan’s national-security adviser, discovered during the Iran-Contra scandal, when he attempted to kill himself by downing a couple of dozen Valiums; he recovered several days later, embarrassed but well rested. For this and many other reasons, the drug was widely abused. At any rate, it earned the company billions of dollars. Sternbach, who retired in 1973 but maintains an office on the Nutley campus, didn’t see much of that; he was paid a dollar for the patent (he has two hundred and forty-one patents) and got a bonus of ten thousand dollars a year.

“It’s a very good drug,” Sternbach said, after the testimonials were finished and most of the Roche employees had returned to their offices and labs. His accent was thick. “It has pleasant side effects. It’s quite a good sleeping drug, too. That’s why it’s abused. My wife doesn’t let me take it.”



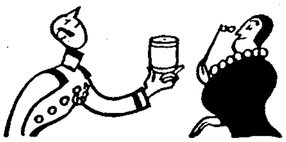
Dr. Leo Sternbach

He said that he used to test his drugs on himself. “I tried everything. Many drugs. Once, in the sixties, I was sent home for two days. It was an extremely potent drug, not a benzodiazepine. I slept for a long time. My wife was very worried.”

A man might be tempted to conclude that unsupervised pharmacological experimentation may not, as was previously believed, have a deleterious impact on longevity. Sternbach, though, made it clear that he never experimented with recreational drugs, or indulged in experimental drugs recreationally. “I like Scotch,” he said, grinning. “Black Label. Or Chivas Regal.”

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE STUMP
HITTING ’EM UP



At eight o’clock last Tuesday night, Cynthia Williams worked her way to the front of a packed crowd at Suite 16, a night club in Chelsea. Williams, who is black, with dyed-blond hair, jumped up and down, screaming, “I love him! I just love him!” She was wearing a button that read “The Doctor Is In.”

A few minutes later, the doctor arrived, in the form of Howard Dean, M.D., a Democratic candidate for President and former governor of Vermont. The other club patrons—almost exclusively white, and dressed in business casual—began chanting, “D-E-A-N in the U.S.A.!” in rock-anthem fashion. The first Presidential primary, in New Hampshire (where Dean is currently polling a close second), is not until January, but fund-raising season has arrived in New York, and the Downtown Dean Series, as it is called, was offering “young professionals” the chance to meet their favorite candidate for sixty-five dollars a head.

“A lot of people get turned on by the way he talks,” a woman named Jennifer Robinson said, as Dean, short and sturdy, removed his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeves, then mounted a small platform, in front of a phalanx of women.

“I apologize for being late,” Dean began, “but I was taping ‘Charlie Rose.’ I’ll be on tonight, so be sure to watch at eleven.” He then delivered a rallying anti-Bush speech, touching on basic issues: health care (more coverage), foreign policy (more multilateralism), media ownership (less Rupert Murdoch), fiscal responsibility (less tax cutting). As he spoke—“Why would anybody invest in America if we behave like Argentina does?”—Robinson trembled and quavered, “*Yeeessss!*”

“I think we have a little time for Q. and A.,” he said at last.

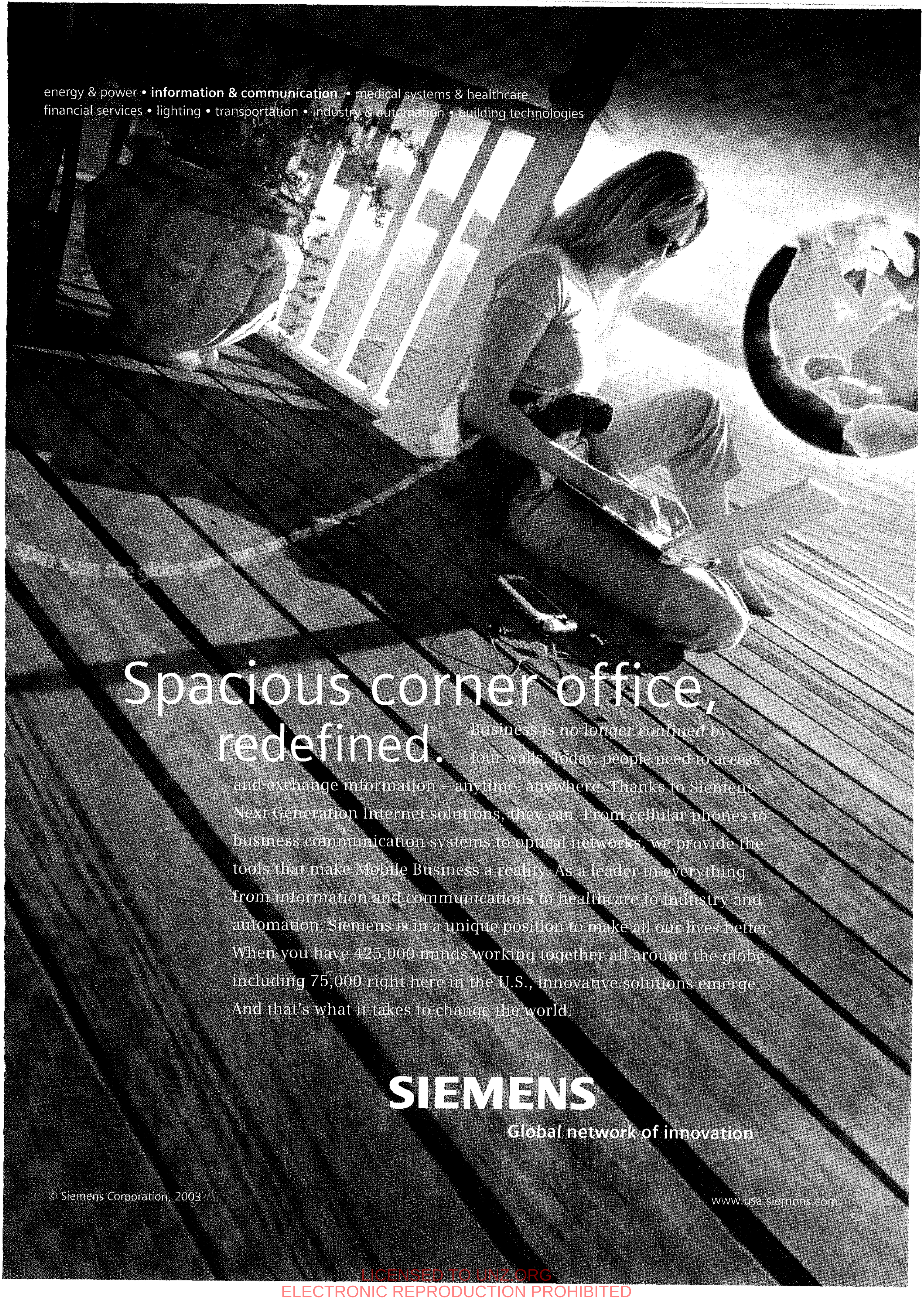
Williams raised her hand.

“If I’m not mistaken, weren’t you in New Jersey at the dinner?” Dean asked. (He was referring to a meeting of Democrats in Atlantic City which he had attended the previous weekend.)

“Yeah, I was,” she said, nodding enthusiastically. “Um, what states do you think you need to win?”

A man in back called out, “Florida!”

Williams is not, to be precise, a young professional; she said that she had been unemployed since September 11th, and, before she discovered Dean (watching C-SPAN over the winter), she was, she said, “on the verge of being evicted. I didn’t know what would happen to my son.” Now that she’s a Dean supporter, things are looking up. “When I say he saved my



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life, I'm not overstating," she said. "Last Friday, I went to the dinner in Atlantic City, and I had to borrow the money to even get down there. But once I got there I had a hotel room waiting for me, meals, everything. We Dean supporters look out for one another, you know? They say they like my enthusiasm."

Downtown Dean adjourned at nine o'clock. The candidate's biggest rival, though, was still stumping. At eleven, as "Charlie Rose" came on, Late Night with John F. Kerry was in full swing a few blocks away, at Lot 61, Suite 16's palindromic counterpart. Well-connected young New Yorkers on left-of-center distribution lists had received an e-mail notice promising an evening "jam-packed with fun, beautiful people"—for a hundred and fifty dollars a person.

Inside the club, where Britney Spears had been dancing on top of a banquette just the night before, large movie screens hung from the ceiling, projecting closeups of Kerry's toothy smile. Chris Heinz, Kerry's thirty-year-old stepson, walked around greeting guests. "I never have fun asking my friends for money," he said. "I'm the only one not having a good time."

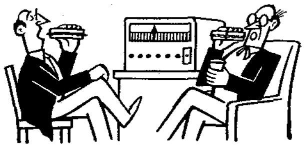
Before long, Kerry emerged from the back of the club, and, after a brief introduction from Heinz, he said, "I've dreamed of this all my life. I get to talk to a group that's been listening to rock 'n' roll and drinking for two hours." He removed his jacket. Then he delivered a rallying anti-Bush speech for about twenty minutes, touching on more or less the same basic issues that Dean had.

Kerry also took questions from the audience; the last came from a glamorous young woman wearing a low-cut white dress who wanted to know how he felt about the charge—levelled by Dean, among others—that he was too similar to Bush to lead the Democrats. "The Bush Administration agenda isn't conservative Republicanism, and it's not radical Republicanism—it's extreme libertarianism," he replied. "We certainly don't need another Republican Party." The woman, a Columbia student named Meredith, had been at Downtown Dean, too. (She had changed clothes between stops.) As the Late Night party began to thin out, after midnight, she looked around—no one was dancing on the banquettes, but one couple was sitting *in* one, making out—and said that she'd been more impressed by Dean. "I found him very compelling," she said. "Not necessarily arousing, but compelling. And the crowd there was more diverse."

—Ben McGrath

THIS JUST IN DEPT.

CALLING ALL CARS



Winter is the season for fires. Night watchman in a warehouse plugs in a space heater and goes on his rounds, the wiring overloads, the area's desolate, so the fire grows until you get the kind of conflagration that Robert and Steven Gessmann watched with their mother thirty years ago, in New Jersey. Their parents had been fans of big, gaudy fires since the bowling alley next door to their apartment, in Union City, went up in flames. They watched raptly from their living room until they realized the windows were getting hot. Robert and Steven listened to a two-way radio for reports of fires. If they heard of one, or if they happened to see a plume of smoke on the horizon, they'd get in the car with their mother. "We'd shut the door and off we'd go," Mrs. Gessmann says. "Plenty of times we rode around and around, circling the fire to see how close we could get before they stopped us."

The Gessmann brothers—tall, thin, cropped hair and beards, wire glasses (they're identical twins)—are forty-three. They now have a business called Breaking News Network, which supplies CNN, several New York City television stations, and the major New York City dailies with bulletins about possible stories—a fire, a flipped car, a perp search, a stabbing or a shooting, a jumper, or a floater in the harbor. Each client receives a pager. The Gessmanns and one or two employees sit in an office on the third floor of a small office building in Fort Lee, New Jersey, a few hundred yards from the George Washington Bridge. They listen to scanners. The Gessmanns recognize that when a voice rises in tone it is likely that a noteworthy event is occurring. Such discernment Steven describes as "an original skill."

Breaking News Network covers a territory extending from Virginia to northeastern Connecticut. The Gessmanns have cultivated a network of sources who send them e-mails and call the office. They divide their approximately four hundred sources into two categories: tippers and reporters. Tippers provide information that the Gessmanns like to hear from more than one source. Reporters have proved sufficiently reliable that their information is issued as soon as it arrives. Tippers and reporters tend to be solitary, housebound men who listen to police and fire scanners, or who have jobs that give them enough free time to listen to scanners at work. Some are insomniacs, and some work midnight to eight. Brooklyn has the most buffs—the Gessmanns call it the buff capital. A few times a year, Robert and Steven hold a barbecue for their tippers and reporters, and sometimes they make road trips to visit them.

The Gessmanns transmit several hundred incidents a day. A typical transmission is brief: "NY>Staten Island>*Barricaded Perp*>120th Pct.>Holland Ave near Richmond Terrace." "Our clients don't want a lot of details," Steven says. "Just a quick blip. They want it on the belt, and they want it instantly." New York cops call a suspect a perp, in New Jersey he's an actor, and in Philadelphia he's a doer. A shooting with "two people likely" means two people likely to die. A fire "in a taxpayer" is a fire in a commercial building. "Pin" means someone is trapped in a car after an accident. The Gessmanns say that only a small number of bulletins ever make it into the papers. Roughly twice a week, someone in New York throws himself under a train or is pushed, and about once a week someone jumps from a window or a bridge, but, because the press is reluctant to cover suicides, most are not mentioned. Steven says that papers in different cities regard news differently: "New York City, we put a stabbing out. Not in D.C. D.C., unless it's a multiple shooting, they're not big on spot news. As you get north, Baltimore is a little more interested, Philadelphia is a little more interested, in New York pretty much everybody wants it."

"What we do is filter the news," Robert says.

"Without us," Steven says, "our clients would need a guy in an assignment room listening to scanners, and they can't listen to as many as we do."

"Where we are," Robert says, "is at the bottom of the feeding chain in the local news."

—Alec Wilkinson

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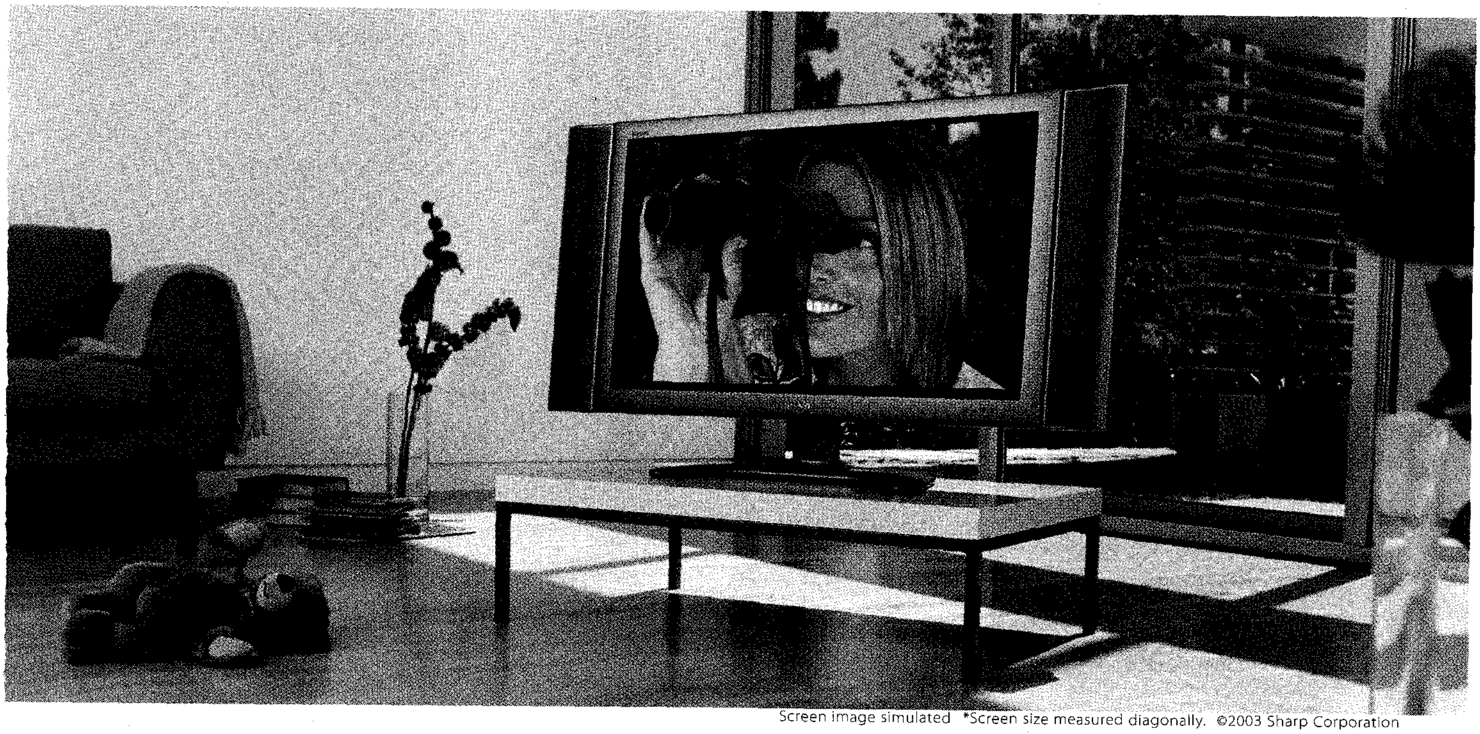

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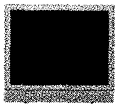

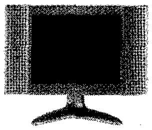

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
ALL IN THE FAMILY

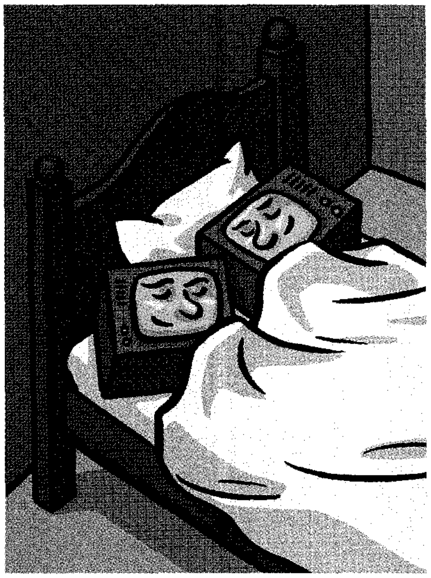
It isn't every day that you find Ralph Nader, Trent Lott, Ted Turner, the N.R.A., and NOW all on the same side of an issue, but last week they were united in condemning the Federal Communications Commission's decision to relax rules regulating the media. The F.C.C. decree expands the number of local TV stations that a company can own and allows companies to own newspapers and TV stations in the same market. Normally, such regulatory changes earn the attention only of K-Street lobbyists and anti-corporate activists. But the F.C.C. ruling, which passed by a 3–2 party-line vote, provoked major bipartisan public opposition, and plots are already being hatched in Congress to overturn it.

At first glance, it's hard to understand what the ruckus is about. When it comes to TV, at least, the ruling will not have a big impact on what most of us get to watch. But in symbolic terms the decision was huge: it suggested that the F.C.C. is happy to smooth the way for the concentration of media market power in fewer and fewer hands.

The familiar argument against such concentration is that, by giving a small number of companies too much control over the flow of information and content, it erodes democracy. But the problem isn't just that a small number of companies run the media business right now; it's that, under the current system, the same companies will likely be running the media business twenty years from now. Media concentration would be fine if there were genuine competition, but, practically speaking, there isn't very much (at least, on the broadcast and programming side), thanks to the regulatory reforms of the early nineties (which, among other things, allowed TV networks to own their own shows, instead of having to buy them from outside studios) and the merger boom of the past few years.

"While it looks like these companies, these oligarchs, compete with each other, they really don't," says Barry Diller, the C.E.O. of USA Interactive and the former head of Universal Studios, which is one of the few remaining producers of independent programming. "What they do is accommodate each other, and smooth things out for each other, while appearing to do otherwise."

In theory, this state of affairs shouldn't be sustainable. If you ignore good programming, you'll pay a price in the marketplace. Fewer people will watch. And your competitors will presumably pick up the shows that you've rejected and will reap the benefits. Eventually, companies that don't put on shows that people like will have to change or go out of business. So you don't need to worry that media concentration will deprive people of real choice. If people want diverse programming, one of the networks will give it to them.



In practice, though, most big media corporations enjoy a degree of insulation from the discipline of the marketplace. Most are run by men who can pretty much do what they want with them, either because they own them, like Sumner Redstone, or because they're protected by a cozy board, like Rupert Murdoch or Michael Eisner. In the past, these moguls have seemed more interested in the size and scope of their empires than in strict profitability, and have been willing to spend money on quixotic endeavors. (There's no crime in that: Rupert Murdoch should be free to spend his money however he wants, whether the marketplace likes it or not.) What's more, the media industry now operates like a cartel, and it isn't in the cartel's interest for its members to bid up the value of programming produced by outsiders. To maintain market power, the cartel keeps it all in the family. As Diller notes, in 1993 independents got sixteen new shows produced. Last year, they got just one.

Advocates of deregulation like to point out that the media landscape is sunnier than it was in the sixties, when ninety per cent of TV viewers watched only the three networks. But that was a different kind of concentration of power. Now big media players control both programming and distribution. Five companies own all the broadcast networks, four of the major movie studios, and ninety per cent of the top fifty cable channels. Those companies also produce three-quarters of all prime-time programming. Ten years ago, four of them accounted for just a quarter of it.

The control that these companies have over supply and demand doesn't leave much room for newcomers. It's impossible to imagine someone today pulling off what Diller and Murdoch did in the mid-eighties, when they started the Fox network, or what Turner did when he started TBS and CNN. There aren't enough independent distribution outlets or independent sources of programming to make the gamble worthwhile. Deregulation is leading to fewer choices, not more. If the F.C.C. doesn't want to do anything about this, perhaps some enterprising antitrust lawyer might.

The media giants' incestuous relationships bring to mind the economy of South Korea, which was dominated by giant conglomerates until the late nineteen-nineties, when it had a meltdown. The conglomerates, or *chaebol*, were notoriously inefficient, dedicated to empire building rather than to profitability. Their sheer size and their connections to the government (and to each other) insulated them from competition and discouraged upstarts. That's why, in the wake of Korea's economic crisis, the advice from Western policymakers was clear: reform the *chaebol* and let a hundred flowers bloom. Perhaps we should tend our own garden, too.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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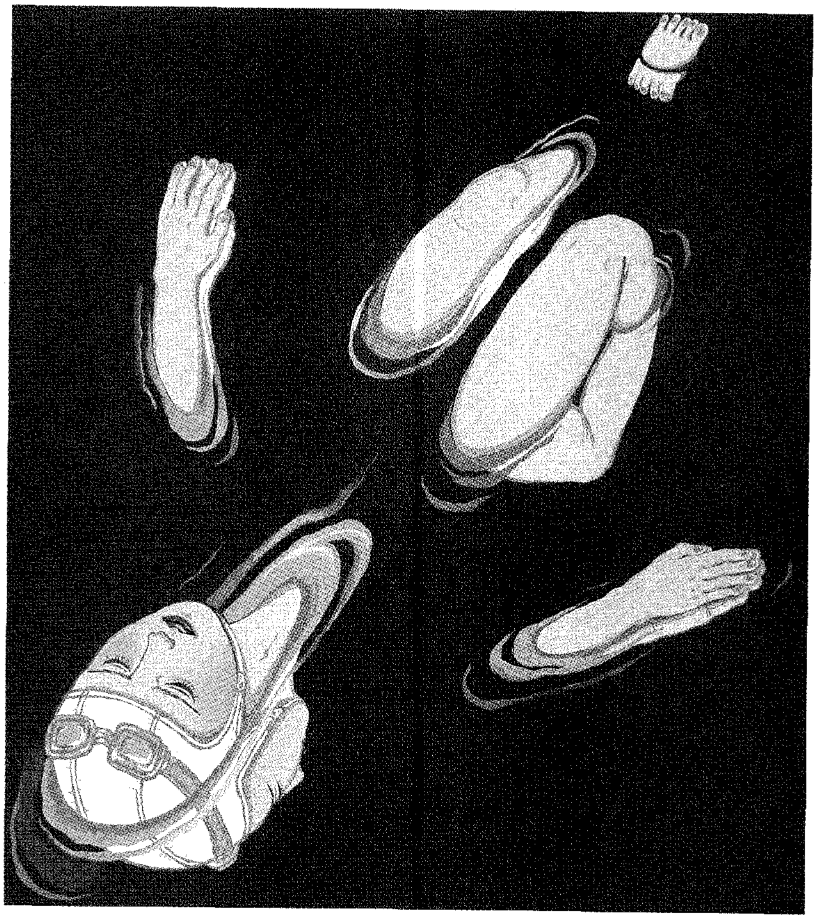
DÉBUT FICTION

ORIGINAL BEAUTY

BY HEATHER CLAY

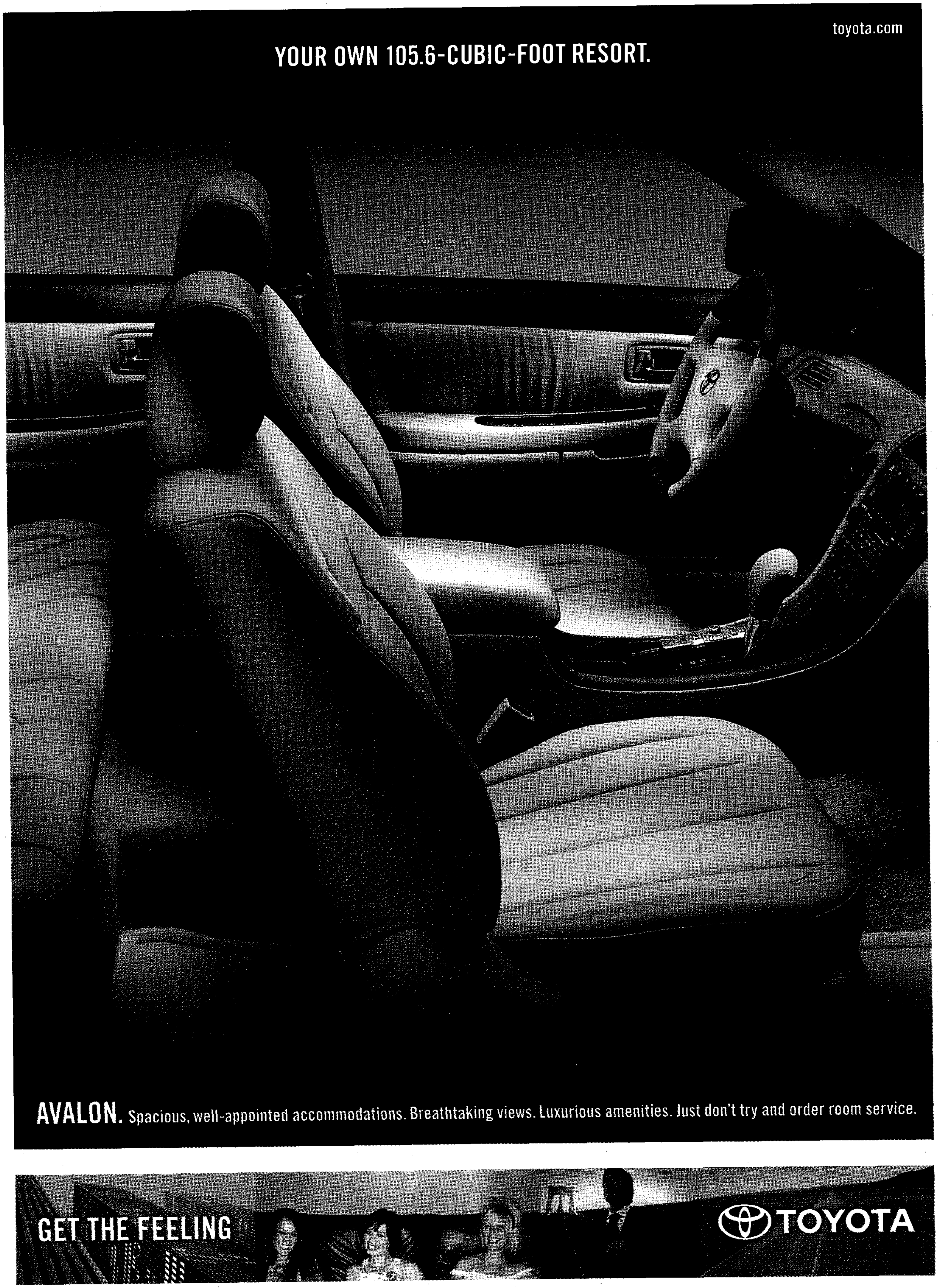
There aren't any bathrooms near the pool, and Mitz has to go. As a kid, she felt blessed with an unspoken permission to pee underwater and did so without shame, relishing, even, the warm brush of urine against her thighs as she treaded. Now she knows better. She's eleven—she and Georgette can't believe defilers who pee and swim at the same time.


YUKO SHIMIZU

She pulls herself up from the deep end in the middle of a game of shark-and-minnow tag, swings her legs onto the concrete deck, and squats, fingering the edges of her suit bottom, getting covered. She stands and finds Georgette in the thrash of bodies swimming across and back; Georgette is already looking up at her, her arms making circles on the surface, her eyes pink and thready, her hair, incandescent from a summer's worth of chlorination, flipped up and stuck to one side of her face. She cocks her head at Mitz. Mitz thumbs right. Georgette nods and dives under. Billy Preston, swim-team co-captain, with his glinty buzz cut and his regulation Speedo and his smooth, tanned, triangular back, pushes off the wall below Mitz and dives in after Georgette, who is frog-kicking like crazy toward the drain, getting smaller and bluer as Mitz watches, her heart constricting slightly and for no reason.

Mitz heel-toes her way across the deck, past the shallow end, past the fenced-in baby pool, out the gate, onto the grass. She has to skirt the base of the hill where the lunch terrace is; there's a rule against walking across the terrace in your suit. The grass is spiky and sharp underfoot; it hasn't rained in seven weeks, and Mitz and Georgette have spent every unspoiled day at the club. Mitz loves best those still moments after the engine cuts and the car sits ticking under one of the sycamores in the early mornings. It's quiet, her bare legs are dry, she waits before pushing out of the back seat with her bag of gear and heading across the pod-strewn ground toward the pool with Georgette, while Mrs. Dupuis or her mom—they play tennis in the same group—makes for the pro shack without saying goodbye. The day is smooth, skimmed like the water then, waiting. Mitz glances out toward the courts as she picks across the grass. Her mother is playing doubles now; Mitz can spot her yellow visor as she leans forward to pick up a ball near the baseline. She's wearing a halfway decent outfit, and Mitz feels relieved. Her mother's main tennis dress, an overwashed eyelet, so short that her panties show, is, Georgette has said and Mitz agrees, an embarrassment.

She rounds the hill, crosses the area outside the snack bar where metal café tables and chairs bake in the sun and no one sits. The girls' and boys' bathrooms stand next to each other, with saloon-style swinging doors. Mitz goes into the girls', a vast, tiled, humid space, empty except for her. The only light comes from outside, from above and below and through the door slats. She regrets not having put on shoes—she never remembers, and, of course, the floor is disgusting. As Mitz lets herself into a stall, she thinks of what she will say to Georgette: So sad my feet have a disease now and they'll fall off by the end of today, I know it. If she's lucky, Georgette will laugh. Georgette hasn't been laughing as often lately, and as Mitz stretches the crotch of her suit to one side and lowers herself to a few inches above the seat, not touching, she goes warm again with the fear that it's because of her. Georgette laughs when Billy Preston throws her into the pool; she laughs when Donna, the only lifeguard they like, gathers her into her lap and starts to separate her dripping, electric hair into sections to braid it. Georgette is cute, with her freckles and her compact body. She passes out Nerds and Sweetarts at meets to swimmers who haven't raced yet, to keep up their sugar levels, wears the same ratty blue tank every day on purpose, because it's the one she prefers; this gives her an aura of confidence that Mitz, in her ro-



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"*Today's lesson is about targets of opportunity.*"

tating array of brightly patterned swimwear, doesn't have. Georgette doesn't need Mitz—or Mitz can't see why she would. She tells Mitz she is perfect, which Mitz knows is an insult, though Georgette acts as though she's bestowing something.

My feet got rickets, Mitz thinks, peeing at last. My feet got herpes simplex. She pictures touching Georgette with one of her feet, Georgette squalling, Georgette smirking in appreciation of her cleverness for absorbing ephemera like disease names. Mitz wipes, flushes, and leaves the stall. She crosses to the sink and keeps her eyes off the mirror while she's rinsing her hands. If she were to look up, what she'd see would be her own endless, boring face: round cow eyes, wheat-colored hair stopped just above her shoulders in its blunt perpendicular. Georgette's hair, when dry, is curly with alternating patches of silky and rough, like a spaniel's. (Once, in an effort to mark herself with some original beauty, some distinguishing inheritance, Mitz had painted a dark mole on her Adam's apple with her mother's liquid liner, complete with a tiny, wayward hair. She'd done it in winter, though, and her turtleneck had smudged the mark off by the time she arrived at school.)

She reaches for a paper towel, looking up, finally, despite herself. When she sees the man in the corner behind her, nothing changes in her—she remembers this afterward. He is standing straight and still in the rear of the bathroom, near the showers, wearing a dark-blue long-sleeved shirt and jean shorts that stop in a fringe of white thread at his knees. His hands are clasped behind him, as if he's an attendant here, or is attending some*one*, perhaps a daughter, a toddler, who will emerge in the next moment from one of the stalls, tugging in protest at her translucent swimmies. He is tall, with a thin face and eyes that strike Mitz even now as beautiful: black and sparkly and full. They are wet eyes. He has been watching her, is watching her now, with concentration. Mitz feels calm, even as she knows with a certainty that increases from half second to half second that his presence here is not explicable. If it were, he would be smiling more, would already have spoken; he would look as if he had shaved, he would be wearing different clothes.

"Excuse me," she says.

Her voice reverberates in the space. The words sound firm to her ears, but also polite. She keeps drying her hands. It has come to her that she should move with less quickness than she would have if she hadn't seen the man at all, as if he were a bear she'd surprised in the woods. She moves her eyes from the man's taut, searching face down to his feet. He's wearing plain shoes, like Keds. They aren't dirty—in fact, they appear new, and Mitz feels perfectly unafraid. Already, a memory of her self-possession is beginning to take hold in her, like early cells dividing: This is how I was, calm. She's gathering details in her head for Georgette; she is going to spill them onto her lap like money. She is going to ball up the paper towel, throw it in the little milk-green plastic trash container under the sink, and walk out. She can picture herself in the sunshine, navigating the bleached grass, home free.

The man's feet move. At first, Mitz thinks he's going to walk toward her, but he's only scratching one calf with his other Ked.

"What's your name?" he says, his voice sounding unused.

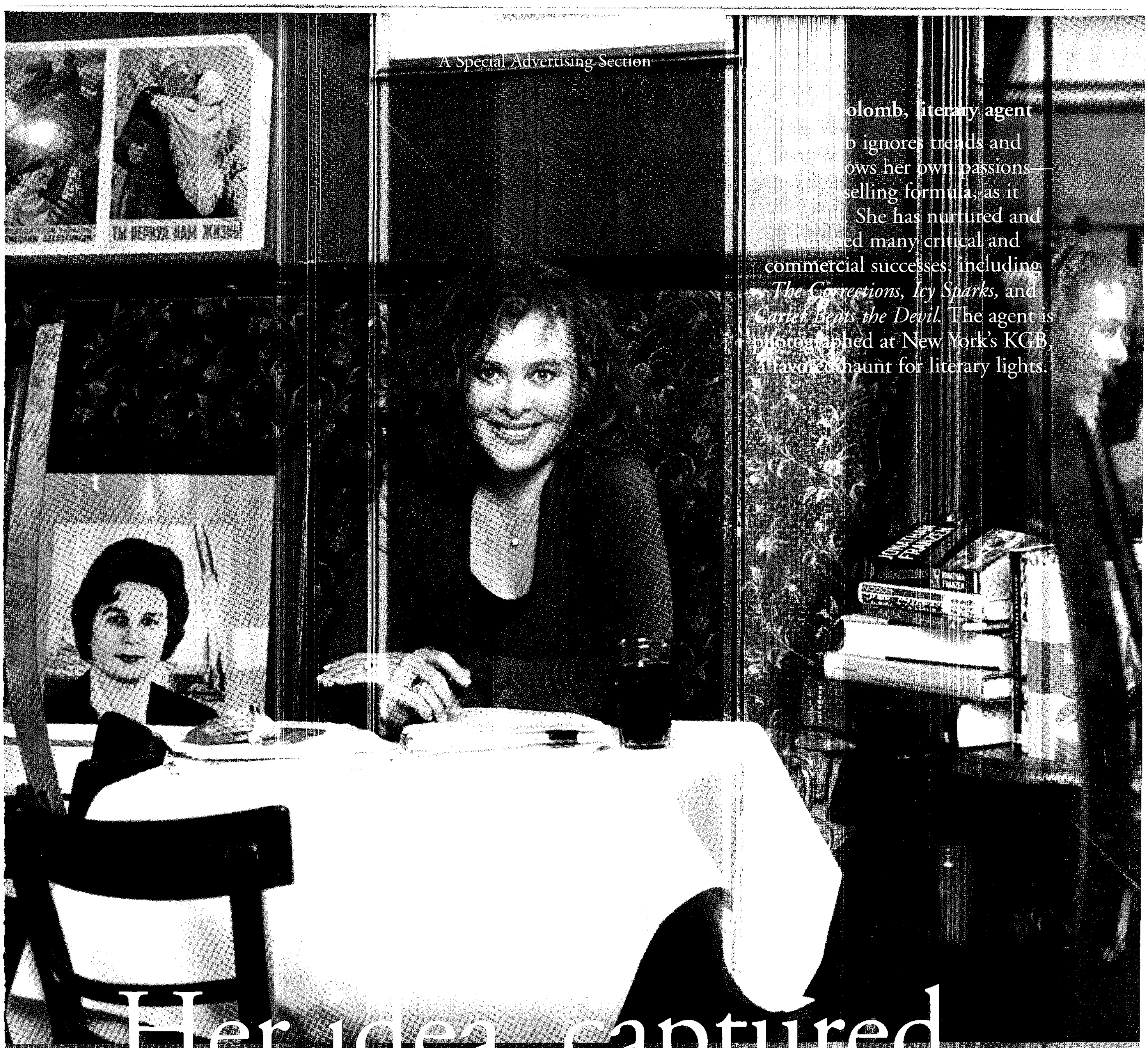
"Georgette," Mitz says. It's the first thing that comes to her, and suddenly she does feel afraid. She shouldn't have said that. She puts the paper towel on the counter and starts moving toward the swinging doors. As she moves, the man does something that doesn't surprise her, though she's never seen it; he forces one hand down the front of his jean shorts. Mitz can see his knuckles rising and falling under the worn material like the felt hammers inside a piano when she drags her hand fast across the keys.

"Take care," the man says. "Bye, Georgie."

He tenses his face a little; otherwise it doesn't move.

"Bye," Mitz says, stupidly. She leaves.

Mitz jiggles her daughter's car seat a bit, even though her daughter is quiet; she doesn't want her to be crying when Georgette walks in. Georgette has chosen the café, a franchise place in one of the new strip malls that Mitz has never been to before, built and landscaped within weeks on a former patch



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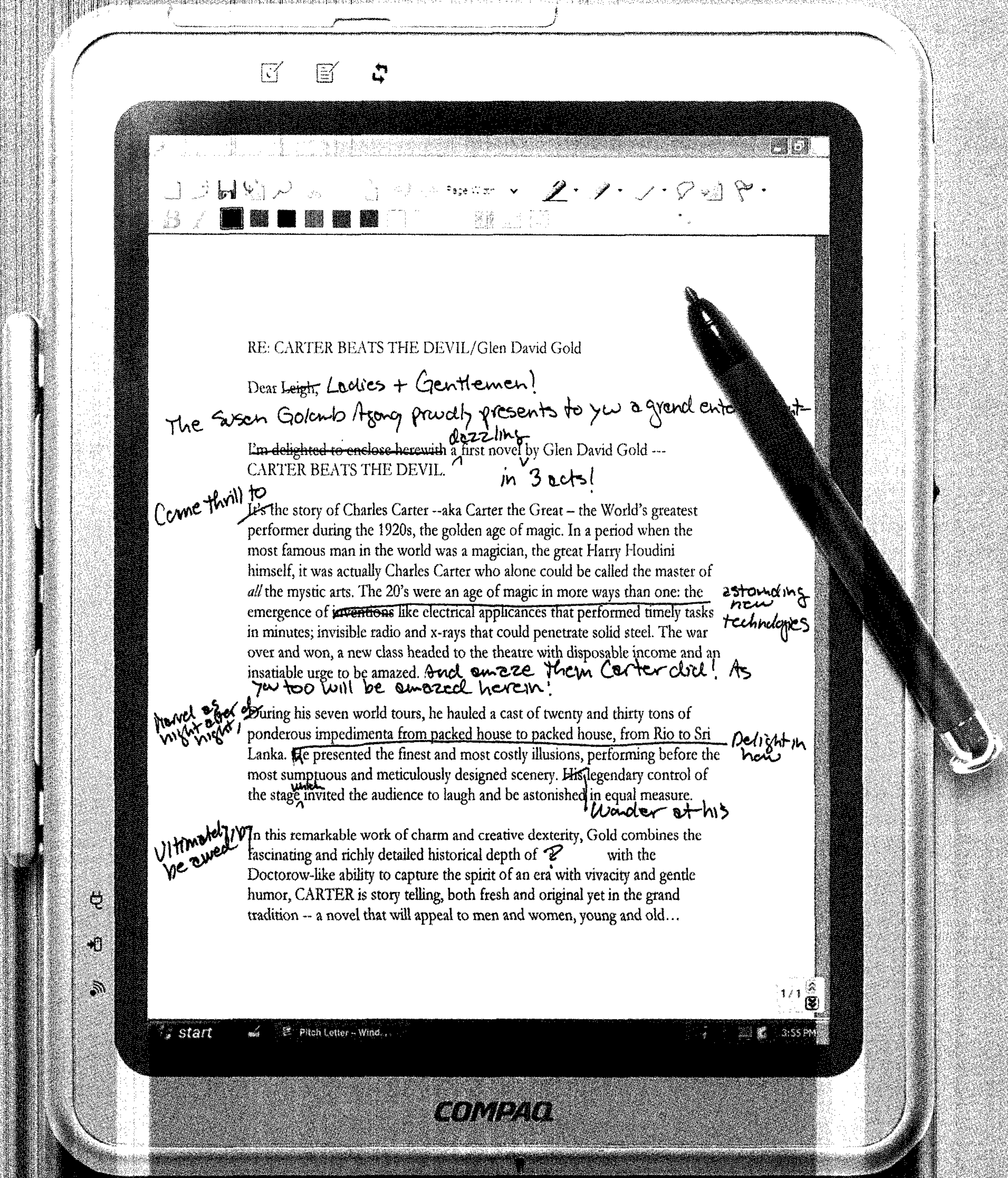

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of farmland. Mitz wills her eyes toward the newspaper she has spread out on the table so as not to be caught watching the door; she hasn't seen Georgette in at least a year, certainly not since the baby was born. Georgette comes home from San Diego when she can to visit her mother, who has been managing what Mitz thinks is a Percocet addiction since her knee replacement a few years earlier, and to see her father, who is older and has been in and out of the hospital. Mitz stirs her coffee. In an instant, Georgette is there, hugging her around the shoulders.

"Hey," Mitz says, reaching up to grasp her, her voice jumping an octave. "How're you!"

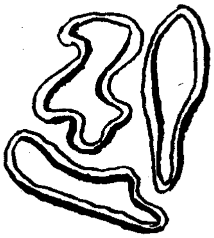
"Good, good," Georgette sings back. She has cut her unruly hair shorter; it puffs around her face like a cloud. She's wearing pants, a long, faded linen jacket. Mitz feels a stitch of guilt in the midst of her excitement at the sight of her friend, thinking of what her husband says, that one would have thought Georgette Dupuis might have ended up sexy—the sly kind of sexy, the interesting kind—but she hasn't aged all that well and she dresses like an art teacher.

Georgette makes straight for the baby. As she bends down to look, Mitz bites the inner flesh of her mouth and smiles at once. She can never be sure who will have a hurtful reaction; she worries that her daughter will be damaged by these somehow. But Georgette grins into the baby's face, her eyes liquid and sincere.

"You are just gorgeous," she says. "Look at my darling girl." Georgette looks up at Mitz, and Mitz wants to embrace her again. Her daughter has Down's. This confuses the most well-meaning people, who tend to turn apologetic or comforting when they run into her in parking lots and at grocery stores. She has heard every story about every Down's child that every remote acquaintance of hers has ever been aware of. She listens to the names and descriptions of these children and their special schools and their sad, special traits, muttering "Asshole" in her head until that part of the talking is done. But Georgette is acting as normal as ever; Mitz feels light with gratitude.

"I'm going to hold her before we leave," Georgette says, sliding onto her chair. "She looks like she doesn't want to wake up right now."

"Good idea," Mitz says. "You don't want to be pissing her off." She says this as if her daughter's cry could rouse a cadaver, even though most of the time it's relatively muffled compared with that of other babies: a fine, steady whimper. Mitz smiles, relieved, feeling like herself. She takes a whole breath. She looks pretty good, she thinks. She lost the weight without effort. She loves her daughter with meteoric force, felt from the first that the Down's was going to have to be a part of life. Mitz's most difficult job is superintending the rage and exhaustion and boredom that are the almost daily result of others-not-getting-this, much as Mrs. Dupuis superintends her phantom knee pain—privately, measuring out her comforts in little doses.



"Wow, Mitzie," Georgette says, staring at her.

"I know," Mitz says.

"You really did something."

"Yeah," Mitz says.

"This makes me feel like I've never done anything." Mitz notices that Georgette looks tired, though her eyes are wide.

"Shut up," Mitz says. "You've done everything." She and Georgette have long done this: engaged in mock fights over who has the better life.

"Maybe." Georgette watches her, smiling back. She rests the side of her face on her hand, every softness and quirk of which would feel familiar to Mitz, even now, if she reached for it, which she won't.

"How's your mother?" Mitz says.

"Semi-coma," Georgette says. "With an inexplicably perfect manicure. It's so unlike her. Are you sure you don't go over there and give her a makeover and prop her up before I get home? You look fantastic, by the way."

"Thanks," Mitz says. "Don't be nasty to your mother. I love her."

"You would," Georgette says. She flicks her eyes toward a place just to the right of Mitz's head. She sighs. "You're perfect," she says. "You're too goddam good to be true."

When they were growing up, Georgette's house was different from Mitz's—smaller, for one thing, but to Mitz's mind superior for, among other things, its interesting modular furniture, its two Persian cats, its carpeted basement. On the nights she slept over, Mitz would follow Georgette into the kitchen and fix herself a Coke, then go down to the basement where Mrs. Dupuis spent entire days folding the family's laundry and watching old movies on TV, smoking Salem menthols in her slow, usual way. Mrs. Dupuis's hair was cut into a boyish bowl shape; she wore rimless octagonal glasses, like Billie Jean King. To Mitz, there was something nobly romantic about the fact that she had come from money yet married a man who ran a pharmacy in a dying part of downtown, as if she'd chosen to buck another, more superficial existence by staying in her nightgown past noon, by doing housework in the basement on sunny days. Not that Mrs. Dupuis had relinquished her maiden self completely: there was still the club membership and the tennis; the six velveteen, grosgrain-trimmed bridge cloths in the bottom drawer of the sideboard.

"Hello, your highnesses," she would say, without looking up. "Hello, Miss Mitz."

The Dupuises ate under a stained-glass hanging lamp in the kitchen, the back door open to the yard and the night breeze. Mrs. Dupuis scooped artichokes and dollops of macaroni and cheese onto their plates—chef's surprise. Georgette tore a steaming leaf off her artichoke without waiting for her mother to sit down, dragged it slowly between her teeth.

"Georgette," Mr. Dupuis said. He was tall, blondish, his face angled and shadowed in the lamplight. He folded his long, clean hands on the table in front of him. "When we have a guest, we don't act like we were raised in a sty. Let's say the blessing and not embarrass ourselves."

"Len," Mrs. Dupuis said, lowering herself into her chair. Mitz looked at Georgette, who looked at her plate.

"How's your mother?" Mr. Dupuis would say next, turning to Mitz, and Mitz knew to brace herself for what was coming. "Be still my heart," he would say every time, smiling and placing a hand over his chest. "Sheesh. Talk about legs."

"She's not a guest," Georgette said, and Mitz felt a twisting pinch on her upper thigh. She groped toward Georgette's chair, and pinched back.

"You're going to grow up just like her," Mr. Dupuis added, for the first time, on one or another of the nights. He scrutinized Mitz's face. "You've got what ends up mattering, it seems to me. Good genes, attractive family. You just hang on until you're eighteen, and we'll say we knew you when."

Later, in Georgette's bed, Mitz wondered if Mr. Dupuis was right, then stopped wondering. She listened to the hum of the air-conditioner and the sound of Georgette's arrhythmic, allergy-plagued breathing. She fell asleep and dreamed that her friend was walking ahead of her on a long sidewalk, with cottony, crimson-stained shapes dropping at intervals behind her, falling out of her clothes and hair. Mitz rushed to pick them up as fast as they fell, so that no one, especially Georgette, would see.

Georgette has ordered hot chocolate for both of them. The drinks come topped with absurd amounts of whipped cream; Mitz lops hers into the trash with her index finger on her way back to the table, then inserts the finger in her mouth. She slows down. It's as if whipped cream hasn't existed between the time she last tasted it and now. She closes her eyes, standing motionless in the middle of the café, wishing she hadn't thrown hers away.

"So," Georgette says, back at the table. "It's great you called. I need some normal human contact. Mom and I went to Betty's Italia last night, and for some reason I ended up eating fettuccine Alfredo. Then we had pudding. I was, like, Time warp? Who eats like that anymore?"

"Oh, no," Mitz says. She smiles apologetically. "I remember that place." Of course I called, she thinks. She is proud that she and Georgette have remained friends, and doesn't mind the custodial role she's taken on where keeping in touch is concerned: she has rarely lapsed on Christmas- and birthday-card duty since Georgette moved away. Anyone who thought to ask after her at a cocktail party might think she and Mitz spoke once a week, as opposed to a handful of times a year, for all the detail Mitz was capable of providing.

"I don't know how you deal with this town. Anyway," Georgette says, and leans forward. "On the phone—it sounded like you had something you wanted to talk about."

"Well," Mitz says, caught unprepared. She'd expected to ease up to this. "The thing is, she's being christened on Sunday." She touches the handle of the car seat again and, smiling, takes a breath before going on.

"Oh—that's so sweet of you," Georgette says. She narrows her eyes. "Well, I'd love to come if I can."

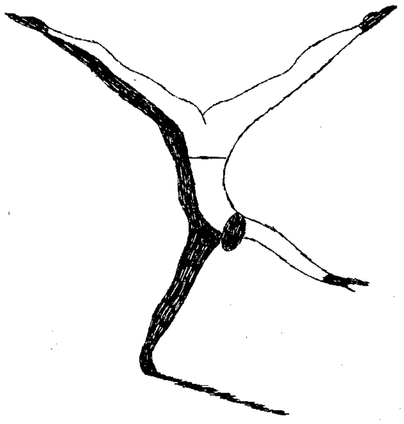
"No—I wanted—if you're still in town, it's not that I wanted you to come, not just that. I wanted to ask you to be her godmother." Mitz sits back in her chair; she's asked. She breathes out, searching Georgette's face for her reaction, her eyes welling slightly at the significance of the moment, though this embarrasses her. She suspects that Georgette, raised Catholic in name if not exactly in practice, might disdain in her adult life the kind of ceremony that requires dressing up and pretending to piety, even for just a few minutes. But since the idea occurred to her Mitz has felt better about something—exhilarated, even. "I know it sounds crazy. It's short notice—I should have written you about it. But there aren't any big job requirements, unless you want there to be. And you don't have to be Episcopalian, if that's one of your concerns."

"Concerns?"

"The thing itself is pretty nondenominational. It's just an idea."

"Why would you want me?" Georgette says, after a moment. Her expression is oddly fixed.

"Because you're my friend." Mitz stops herself from saying *best* friend. She is trying to stave off . . . not surprise or panic, yet, but a glimpse of unanticipated failure that is beginning to unfurl like a scrim at the edges of her vision as she talks. There may be some contingency that she forgot, or never knew to consider, nudging this exchange off course. She supposes it's possible that she's a joke to Georgette, who works for a big telecommunications company in California, whose parents divorced in high school, whose fifty-two-year-old boyfriend, Bob, visits a shaman, writes scripts for television, and doesn't believe in marriage. Mitz has made all the expected choices. I might make other ones someday, she wants to say, or take these ones back. You don't know.



"But I never see you," Georgette says.

"Well, here I am." Mitz's voice has risen to a near-whine, but she presses on. "And Billy thinks it's a great idea."

Georgette begins to laugh. She presses her fingers over her eyes. It takes her a few moments to stop. "He does?" she says. Mitz married Billy Preston, the most beautiful boy in town. Georgette feigned jealousy when they first started dating, though Mitz knows that Billy—Bill now, to everyone else—is not someone Georgette would actually have considered marrying. "I never knew he thought of me as the godmothery type." Georgette picks up her mug of hot chocolate and slurps. "Anyway," she says, exhaling. She reaches into her purse, extracts a pair of tinted glasses, and puts them on. "It's bright."

"I love those," Mitz hears herself say. She does. She loves the way they look terrible on Georgette and tilt, ill fitting, to one side. They look old. Mitz misses her friend with such sudden, disorienting intensity that she feels almost nauseated, even though Georgette is sitting right here in front of her.

Georgette looks away. "You know, my dad's not doing so well," she says. "I'm just schizo. He's back in the hospital."

"Oh, Georgette," Mitz says. At the milk-and-swizzle counter, a skinny boy opens a packet of sweetener into his cup, then tongues the excess powder off the rim with feline delicacy while Mitz tries to think of the next right thing to say. "I'm sorry. I've been—I know you have a lot on your mind."

"It's hard, because you never know—he's been this bad before. I think. I'm not sure if he has, actually," Georgette says. Mitz nods. "He's pretty lucid when I see him, though after they give him his pain-killers at night he's in and out, you know? I mean, he's almost eighty, so I shouldn't be surprised."

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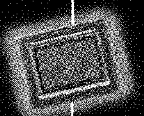

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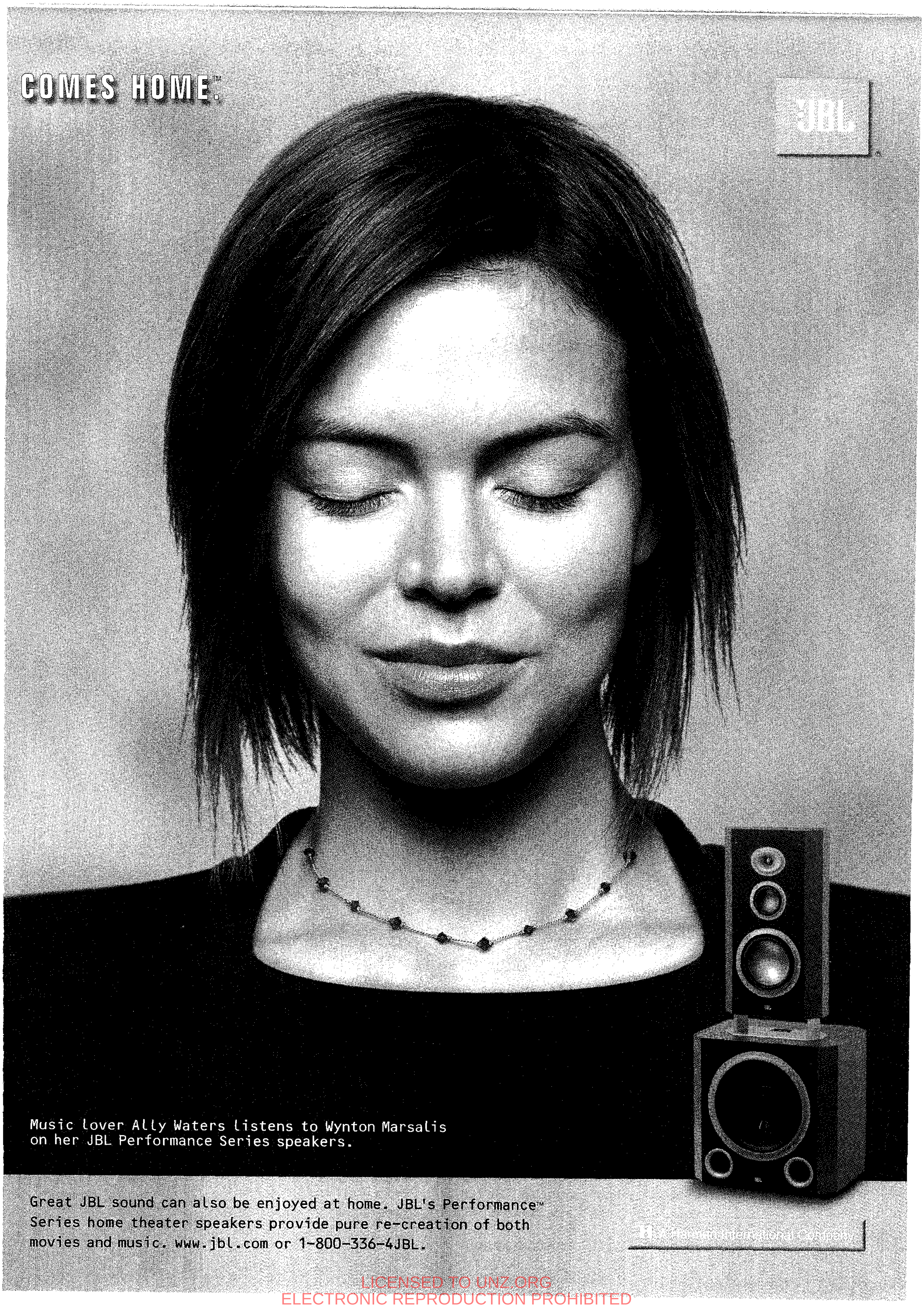
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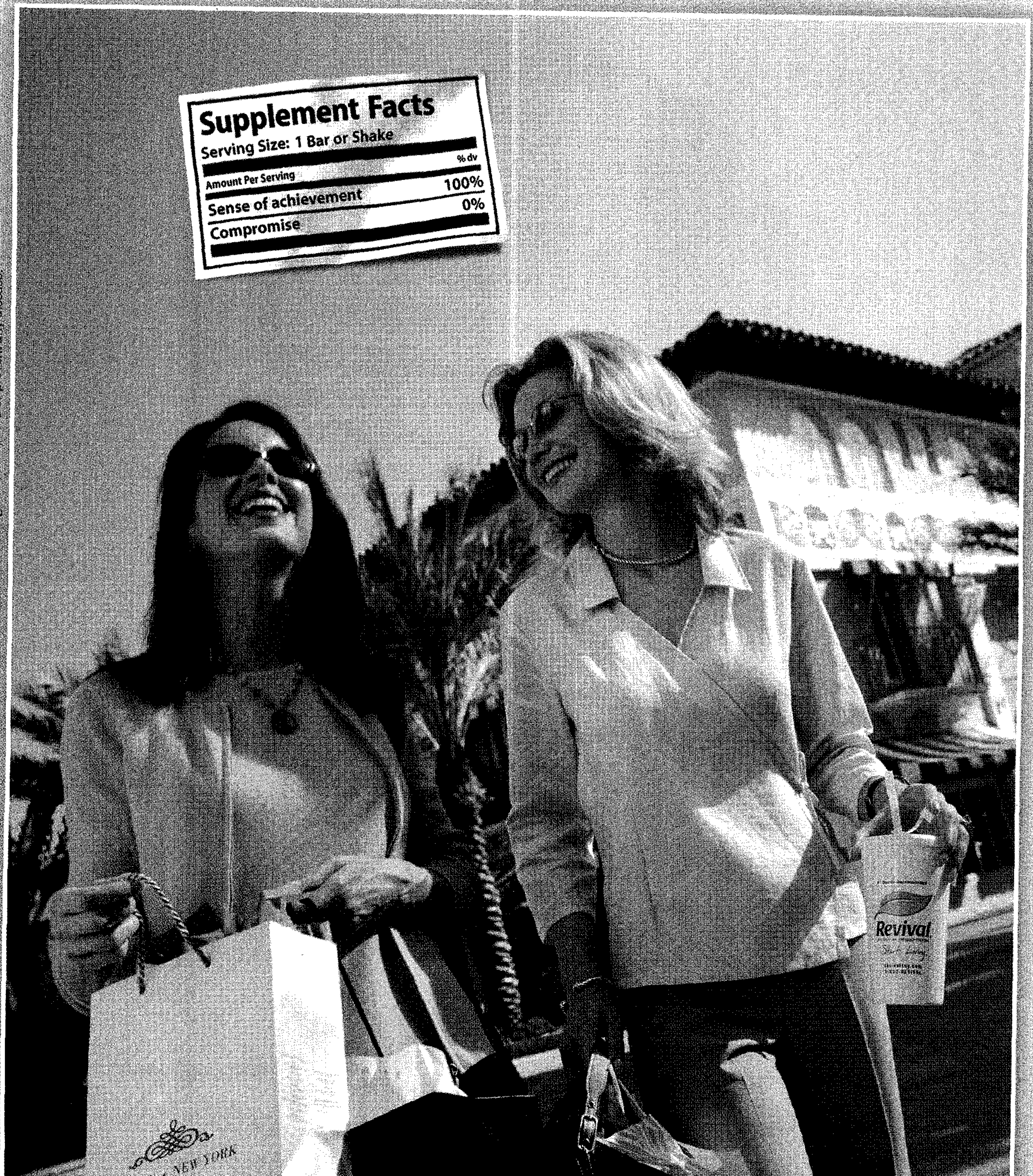
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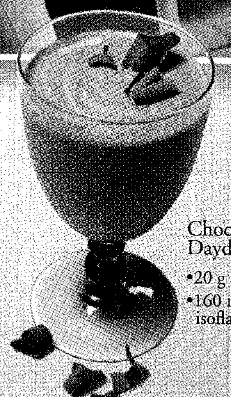

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Mitz thinks of Georgette's father. In a way, he has always seemed eighty to her: remote and authoritative and fragile. Now he really is eighty. It is unfathomable that so much time has passed.

"I was in his room yesterday—he's at Central Baptist—and he wanted to turn over. He was grousing and I went to help him, but he had already pulled the sheet way up and was doing it himself, so I was just standing there like a half-wit while he rearranged himself, and I could see everything in a flash, because his gown was tangled up and the sheet billowed so there was a space under it and there they were—his balls, then the side of his ass. All these things I've never seen before on him."

Mitz says nothing.

"This is what has made me sadder than anything else," Georgette says. She pushes the glasses up onto her head, annoyed with them. "Seeing his balls. If he knew I'd seen him that way, he would die. And the point is, when I saw just that glimpse I knew that he *would* die, in a way that I never did before. He just looked . . . old. It was terrifying. Is that crazy?"

"Of course not," Mitz says. She feels dismayed at her own intuition: the baby is on the verge of fussing. She can sense her coming awake; a change in temperature seems to graze her skin, and in those instants between the change and the baby's first sound she doesn't know what to do with herself. She looks into Georgette's eyes, projecting sympathy with all her strength, while she begins to line up the sugar bowl, the creamer, the tiny metal vase with its lone silk zinnia in front of her on the table. She should just go ahead and pick up the baby. She keeps her eyes on Georgette as she bends forward, extending her hands down toward the car seat. She wraps her hands around the sides of her daughter's body and the warmth of it makes her fingers itch, her legs tense with desire; she lifts her out, cradling her head, and arranges her on her lap, pulling down the sleeves of her cardigan and the cuffs of her cotton pants, smoothing the bib across her chest. Her daughter looks up at her with her constantly surprised eyes, and stays quiet.

"Listen, Bob's coming day after tomorrow," Georgette says. She clears her throat. "I told him I didn't know how long I was going to stay this time."

"That's nice of him."

"I think so."

"Georgette," Mitz says. The vision of Mr. Dupuis in the bed has reminded her of something. "Remember Pennsylvania?" She looks up, hopeful.

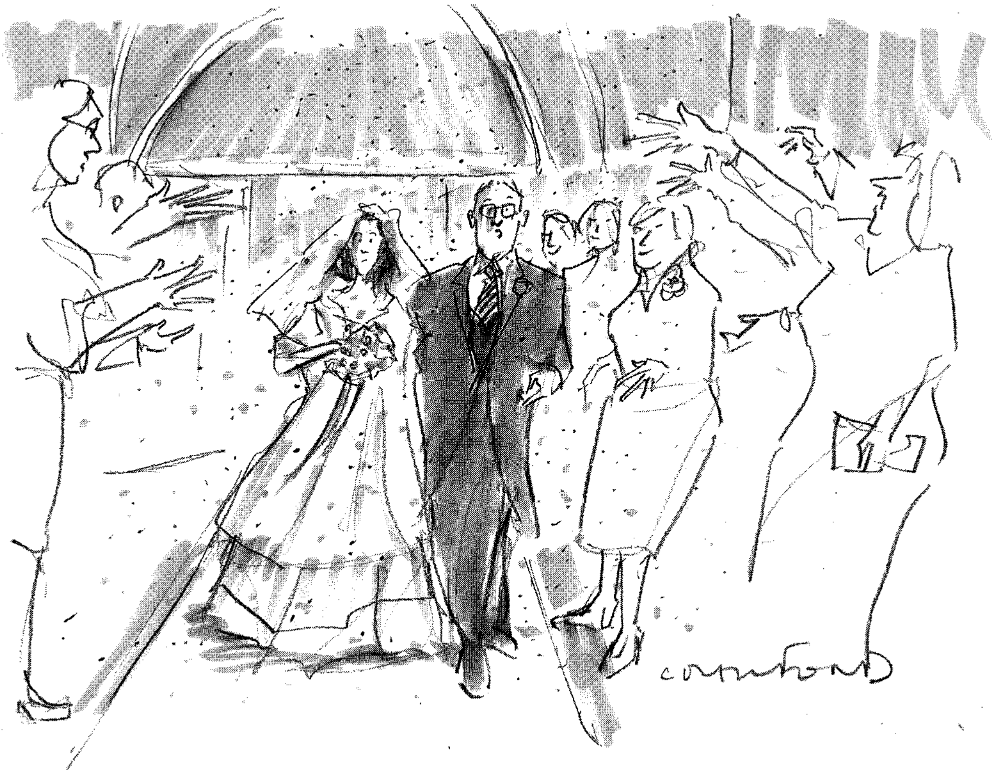
She and Georgette went together to Pennsylvania once, during the summer of the year Georgette's parents were divorced. They were sixteen, seventeen—Georgette's father had taken them on a vacation to a bug-ridden permanent camp in the Allegheny National Forest. The three of them had occupied something called a tentalow, with an outdoor shower, which Mitz had unlatched one afternoon, clutching the plastic shower basket that she and Georgette shared, with its limp washcloth mitt, shampoo and conditioner, Jean Naté splash. There she found Mr. Dupuis, standing naked under the spray, his eyes closed, his hands wedged under his armpits, rotating at the waist, reminding Mitz of the little boys at the club, the way they stood thin and exposed under the sprinklers on the ninth green, or during a lull at swim practice. Mitz had felt less embarrassed at the sight of his thatch of pubic hair, the slack length of penis hanging from it, than she had at the pleasure on Georgette's father's face at the feel of the water on his skin, the heat. He was smiling, with his lips open, as if about to speak. Mitz had tiptoed away without relatching the door, run across the grass to tell Georgette, and the two of them had laughed until they had to clutch their stomachs. Georgette had never seen her father naked—that Mitz would be the first! It was too much. They had joked about it for years afterward, though Mitz had never been able to describe exactly what it was that had struck her about Mr. Dupuis's face, and how it had made her feel, as if she had violated something.

Georgette is smiling.

"Of course," she says. She chews the tip of her pinkie, her rings clinking together. "I know. I guess you didn't freak."

"He was happy," Mitz says. "I remember how happy he looked. I can't explain it. I just don't think you should worry. I don't think he would want you to feel afraid."

Georgette looks at her. She reaches to



"Just hope my fiancée doesn't find out about this."

• •

touch Mitz on the arm, and lets her fingers rest there.

"Thanks," she says, finally. "Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh before." She hoists her handbag off the floor and extracts a comb from one of its pockets, begins whipping it through her filmy hair in short strokes. "That must have sounded mean. Something just struck me funny, the idea of me being a holy influence on the child of someone I used to act like such a loser in front of."

Mitz smiles, unsure of Georgette's meaning.

"I couldn't stop following Billy around." Georgette begins to laugh again.

"We all did that," Mitz says.

"Remember I tried to kiss him at the club? Where that pond is, by the driving range?"

"Uh-huh," Mitz says. It may be that she recalls this particular story, though whether Georgette or Billy told it to her, and when, she isn't sure. But it makes sense; it's even sweet. They were all young together.

"I went for his neck and missed. That bizarre day, the day that weirdo scared you at the club." Georgette closes the fingers of her free hand around the baby's foot and shakes it gently. "Who knows what I thought I was doing. I felt so bad that day; I should have been with you. Listen, could Bob come, too? To the christening. I'd be honored. I really would."

"Yes, of course," Mitz says. Bob will be pleased, she thinks. He took an inexplicable liking to Mitz after his first visit, one of a handful over the years. Occasionally, he forwards her group e-mails about a charity he's involved with, some obscure one having to do with political amnesty, always attaching a personal tag line for her, like "How's it hanging!" or "Hey there, Mom!" Mitz feels patronized by this. She knows that, in Bob's mind, she is merely the pretty small-town girl who could've done things and hasn't, who was smart enough to have left. It's the dramatist in him. He doesn't know her. She never writes back.

The women have been given the all-clear for adult swim. They hand the children over to their sitters, secure their rubber caps and goggles, lower themselves in chest-high, elbows flapping, as gingerly as cranes. Their fifteen-minute lane patrol is infinite. Backstroke, sidestroke, flip turn, breaststroke, Australian crawl, mouths making O's above the surface of the water as their faces turn sideways, cheeks submerged, sucking breath like they're trying not to die.

Mitz had been sitting at the edge of the pool for an indeterminate time, fruitlessly watching the water for Georgette's shape. Finally, she'd given up and approached Donna's lifeguard chair, whispered that there had been a man in the bathroom, that he wasn't one of the fathers. Donna, impassive behind her reflective aviators, had listened, muttered "Shit," and gone off to deal with the situation; fifteen minutes had passed, and now Mitz was descending the steps, having cut across the terrace without caring, though the ladies in their piqué and spikes had only glanced up at her in vague recognition. Everyone here knew everyone else; that was how it was. The club was a blessed, dappled planet.

Mr. Frederick, the overweight club manager, stood sweating with Donna on the patio outside the snack bar (that kid world, as she thought of it years later, that windowless child tavern where the kids Mitz's age and older sat on barstools all day, sporting one another lunch on the family tab, beating one another at Ping-Pong, knocking back suicides—frothing mixtures of Coke, Sprite, and orange Fanta—screaming over the odd porn magazine that Billy was able to pilfer from his father, their lungs dense with grease smoke, unwholesome air). His blazer was draped over one of the metal chairs.

"Mitz," Donna said when she saw her, and Mitz stopped, blinking, somewhat surprised that Donna's memory of her features hadn't evaporated between the pool and here. "The guy left," she said. "The cops are coming." Mitz kept her eyes on the terrain Donna's low-slung breasts made under her suit, the damp places where her skin touched the fabric.

"O.K.," Mitz said. She felt dumb.

"Does she need to talk to them, too?" Mr. Frederick said to Donna, indicating Mitz. "Did she just see him in there or—"

"They'll need a description from her, surely," Donna said. She turned to Mitz. "Did you just see him in the bathroom or did anything happen? Did he say something?" And though Donna's quick, even delivery signalled to Mitz that she could respond as she chose and not be attached in Donna's mind to anything the man had or hadn't done (and Mitz felt more confused about this now, about what the word "happened" might contain if she were to peer into it—a scant, uncategorizable film at the bottom of a bucket), she answered, "No."

Mitz was sent down to the tennis courts by herself. She watched her mother's foursome play out a point from behind a taxus hedge, fingering the matchstick leaves and dusty red berries that Georgette had once told her were poisonous and that her father had said signified the coming of fall. She could keep on walking, she thought, down the long drive and out the club gates, into the surrounding neighborhood, keeping to the edges of people's yards so she wouldn't need her shoes. There was a Dairy Queen nearby that she and Georgette were occasionally allowed to ride their bikes to. They sat in a window booth and sucked Mister Mistys, racing each other toward brain freeze. If Mitz went there now she could order one, promising to pay later, and sit by herself, sipping slowly. This thought filled her with a coursing relief. After an hour or more, it didn't matter how long, Georgette would notice once and for all that Mitz was gone, and she would be looked for, and found.

"Hey, you," Mitz's mother said. The point was over; they were changing sides. Mitz's mother trotted over to the hedge. As she approached, Mitz felt clamped by the same disappointment she'd felt when telling Donna. She saw into herself; she was nothing more than a pandering, automatic confessor. Still, she downplayed as much as she could, hating the grim set of her mother's mouth more than she could remember hating anything.

When Mitz and her mother opened the door to Mr. Frederick's office, an artificially lit space next to the main dining room, a girl named Andrea—a slightly older girl with big thighs whom Mitz had seen bobbing in the shallow end with a couple of different kids that summer, babysitting, she supposed, though neither she nor Georgette really knew her or would have considered her worth remarking on—was sitting there alone. Mitz felt both excited and ashamed to see her. Andrea was completely dressed;

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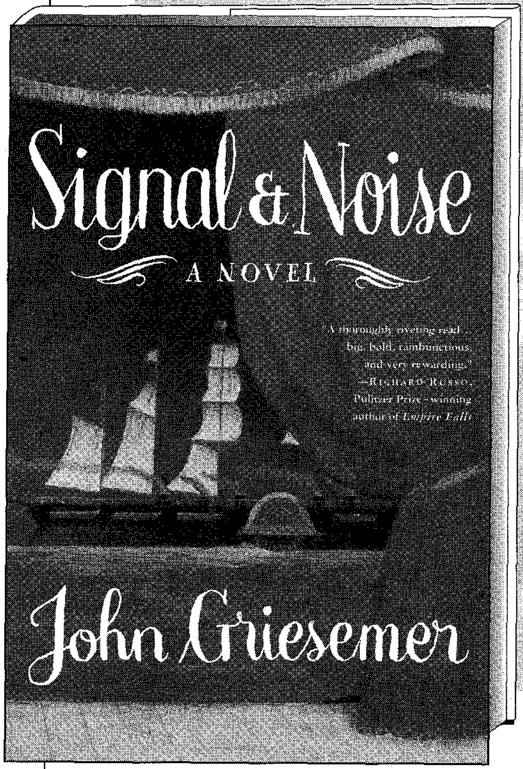
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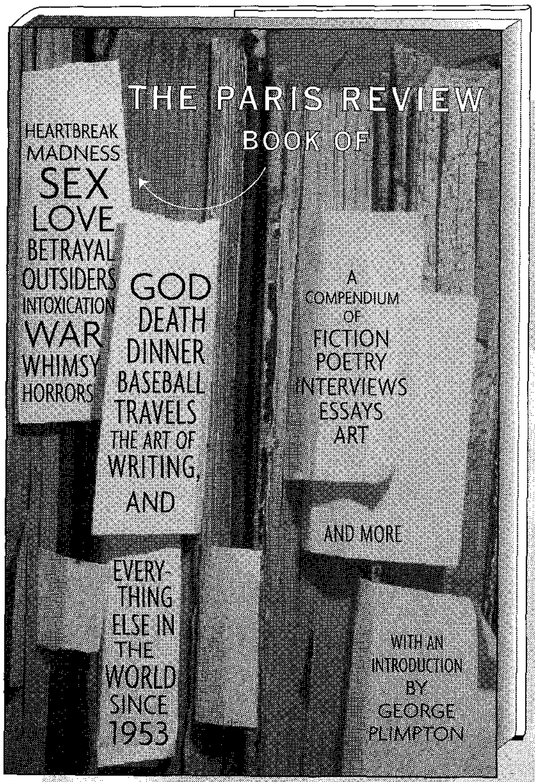
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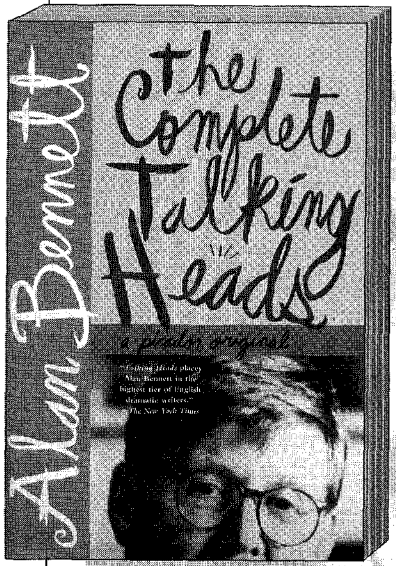
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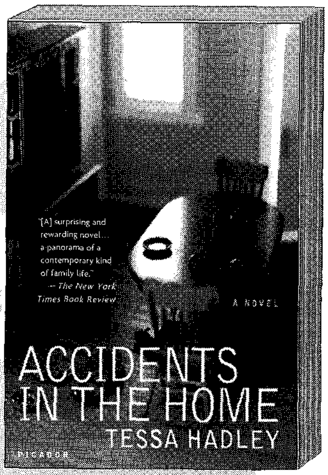
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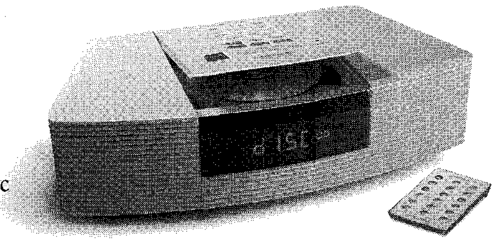

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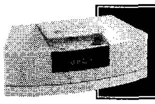

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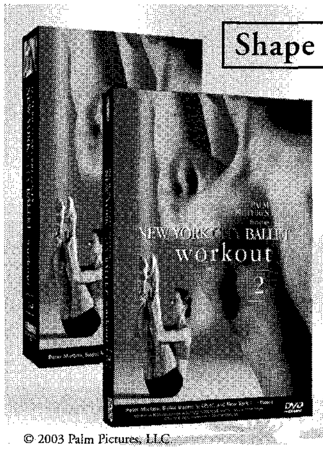

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her shorts looked too pressed against her doughy legs; the goosebumps on her arms were visible.

"Hi, darling," Mitz's mother said. It was what she would have said to any girl. She was looking around.

"Hi," Andrea said. "Hey," she said, glancing at Mitz. Her voice was sing-songier, more feminine than Mitz might have guessed it to be. Mitz couldn't read her expression.

"What are you doing here?" Mitz said. The insignificance of Andrea made her brave, or ruder than usual.

Andrea swung her feet so that her sandals dragged against the linoleum floor. "Well," she said, looking up at Mitz's mother, "I guess something happened." Andrea smiled at both of them, and then, to Mitz's shock, she began to cry.

Mitz's mother kneeled down in front of Andrea and touched her wide, pink knees with great gentleness.

"Christ," she said under her breath.

Mitz hands her daughter to Georgette and makes her way back to the counter. She buys a large double mocha latte with extra whipped cream. It costs almost six dollars. She shakes cinnamon onto it and lowers the cup into a cardboard sleeve.

She and Georgette drive to Central Baptist in Mitz's car, the baby facing backward in the rear seat. They are headed toward the same hospital where Mitz's daughter was born, where each test had taken place beforehand. First, the prenatal blood work, her low levels of an unpronounceable protein. Then the amnio; that had been at seventeen weeks—too late to abort, though she and Billy had decided after the initial screening that, whatever happened, they were going to have the baby. They'd waited thirteen days for the amnio results, then sat in a hallway in plastic chairs while their O.B. explained to them about the fetus's malevolent extra twenty-first chromosome. Billy had cried, but she hadn't, not then. Given her age, she knew the chances of this happening were about one in a thousand. It didn't seem like such a long shot. She kept repeating it in her head: one in a thousand, then faster—oneinathousand, oneinathousand—while she stroked Billy's hot hand.

When they enter Mr. Dupuis's room,

they find him smiling at them, sitting upright.

"Girls," he says. "Mitz!" He opens his arms. The skin on them is colorless. It hangs wrinkled, marsupial, from the bones, near the place where his arms disappear into the short sleeves of his gown.

"Hey, Mr. Dupuis," Mitz says. She will never call him Len. She carefully lowers the car seat onto the floor and moves to hug him. He smells of orange drink and shaving lotion. He grips her surprisingly hard.

"What have you brought me?" Mr. Dupuis says. He looks at Georgette. "A grandchild, my love? That's thoughtful of you. I could use one."

"You seem better, Pop," Georgette says. She eyes him, skeptical.

"Who knows," Mr. Dupuis says. "You missed the new pain-management guy just now. He's got me squared away."

"We brought you something," Mitz says. She takes the drink from Georgette. Like a child, she wants to be the one to give it. The whipped cream has flattened on the ride over, but the cup feels warm in her hands. Mr. Dupuis reaches out for it. A drop of gray liquid spills onto the sheet. He looks up.

"This is the most ridiculous . . . A sundae?"

"For you," Mitz says.

Mr. Dupuis raises it to his lips. When he tastes it, his eyes go radiant.

"Chocolate," he says. "Oh, yes."

The baby is burbling, smacking her lips. Mitz picks her up, snatches a bottle of formula from the diaper bag, and settles into a chair in the corner. "Let me get some lunch into this one," Mitz says. "I can only stay for a minute." The baby closes her mouth around the nipple and watches Mitz as she pulls.

Georgette pats the side pockets of her pants, then shrugs and sits down on the bed. Mitz can tell she's glad they've come. Georgette's father is whispering, loud enough for Mitz to hear, about his roommate, whose feet Mitz can make out in the gloom behind the metal drape that divides the room in half.

"The worst dementia," he's saying. "Won't stay in his bed. Kept me up all night."

Mitz waits for a moment, then stretches just a little to one side to peer around the drape. The roommate's TV is on. She can see the ridges his thin legs make, and a bit of movement under the blanket covering him: what must be a hand, sliding on the bottom sheet away from his legs and back again in the kind of absent motion people make when they're at rest and aren't conscious of taking in texture. She pulls back before she can see the man's face.

They had been at an age of knowing the word "come," she remembers that much, though she can't recall if she and Georgette knew its true meaning yet; they still played with Barbies privately, in their rooms. How old had they been, exactly? Eleven? Twelve? Young. It seemed unbelievable that she had come that close to being fondled by some perv like poor Andrea Snyder had; she hadn't thought of that in forever. She remem-

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bers how excited she'd got telling Georgette about what had happened, on the telephone, sometime after her mother had driven her home. Georgette's reactions in those years could make Mitz into someone more vivid than she was, transform her into a deft, wild storyteller. She had surely exaggerated her own part. But, without remembering specifically what she said, she knows that there were things about the afternoon she never would have described. How in Mr. Frederick's office Andrea had looked at Mitz as if for help, then folded herself into Mitz's mother's perfumed, sweaty arms and stopped talking. How Mitz had stood there, watching Andrea cry. How the man in the bathroom was being taken away from her, had instantly become this strange girl's memory, history, neurosis, burden, life. Nothing about him belonged to Mitz, or ever had; she wasn't the one coming undone.

On Sunday, Mitz laughs along with the priest and the guests when her daughter flails her foot out, angry at the tap water being flicked down the short length of her body. Billy stands to one side of her, smiling, in a new suit, and Georgette stands on the other. The church is empty except for the small group they've invited; Mitz loves the echo the incantation makes, the perfect plumb of the chancel windows. For a minute, she feels the kind of pure happiness that nearly convinces her she's been happy, and that she will be. Even Bob, who has let his hair grow, who looks slightly fuller around the middle since the last time Mitz saw him, takes pictures.

She glances up at Georgette at the altar and Georgette meets her eye, winks without smiling. She has sneaked on a coat of lipstick since Mitz last looked—a red that someone ignorant of her style, someone like Billy, might say doesn't flatter her. Mitz shifts the baby on her hip, seeing the future for a moment. Soon, she thinks, whether in a matter of weeks or years, Mr. Dupuis's life will end, and Georgette, and even Mrs. Dupuis, will grieve. Mitz herself will grieve. She'll be back at the hospital more often at that point, when the heart and intestinal problems that are likely to surface in the second or third year of her daughter's life show up. Georgette will fly back to California and stay, and Bob will do his best to love her, and she and Mitz will lose touch with each other in the end, despite today. The foolishness of her idea, that she and Georgette could know each other as completely as they used to, know each other's thoughts and bodies and days the way certain girls at a certain age can, is clearer to her now. She hands the baby to Georgette for her part.

Last night, ironing the baby's gown, she had thought of this: of how she had put Georgette's name in the bathroom man's mouth instead of her own, had strung the two of them together like beads. She had actually smiled with pity there in the laundry room, thinking of all the nights she'd lain awake worrying about that, full of a kid's lopsided sense of her own power. She'd thought then, honest to God, that what she'd said had constituted some kind of curse, and she waited for the future to come to her so that its fallout might be revealed. The cops' apprehension of Andrea's flasher, as her mother's friends euphemistically referred to him, the eventual demolition of the snack bar and the bathrooms and the slow construction of a food pavilion, closer to the pool and to lifeguard supervision, could hardly distract her from her mistake. They started the new school year. Mitz made fun of the boys who were beginning to pay a different kind of attention to her than to her friend. She and Georgette ate lunch every day at the same table—"salads" of croutons soaked in Italian dressing. As Mitz moved through those days, abject in the midst of an increasingly bitter confusion over how swiftly they passed, how they came at her without stopping and all she wanted was for one or another of them to *stop* so she might have time to take a hard, full breath, she didn't dare leave Georgette's side, or cease thinking, as she fished her croutons one by one from the bowl: Which one of our lives is going to be blighted, and when?

"What should I do?" Georgette says now from behind her teeth, her voice barely audible. The baby squirms a little in her arms.

"Just stand there and look pretty," Mitz says back, returning to the moment, forgiving them both. She smiles. "That's it. You're doing great." ♦

THE END

The end occurs not at the end but when I'm still
at the edge of the middle of things.

Toys and plastic chairs lie scattered across the lawn,
the picnic table's spread under an arching beech,

but these human signs can't speak
of the necessary shift, and even the cloud

that cuts the monotonous sky with a brilliant pink
has nothing to do with this change.

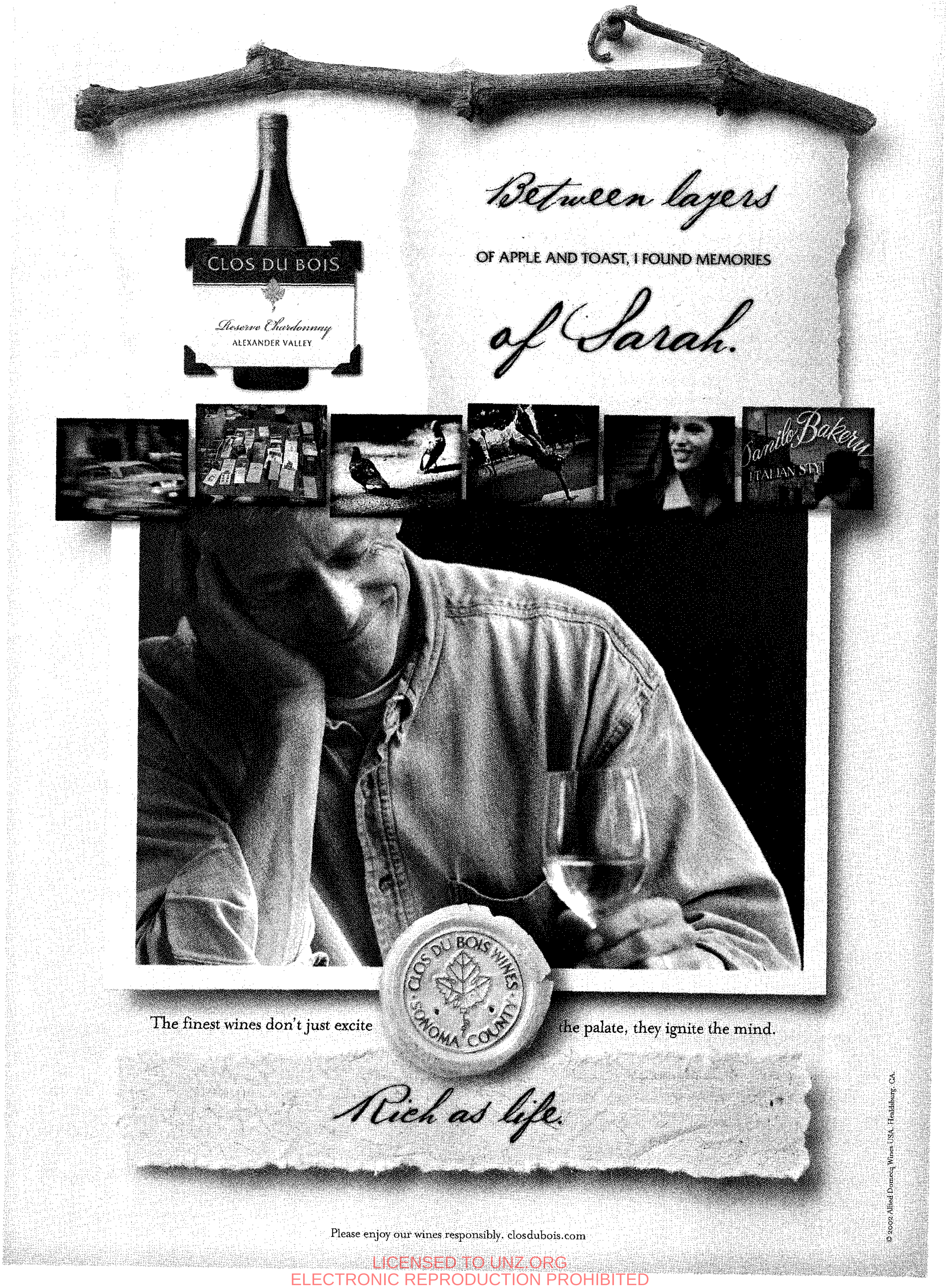
The particular, the compelling object, breaks.
And alone, in place, remains

not the common master, waving long flamboyant arms,
but a self subtler and altogether more dangerous.

Out beyond courage and vanity,
I am complete, cut off,

like the silver-bowled lake
or the deep, impervious dark.

—*Nadia Herman Colburn*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FAMILY ALBUM

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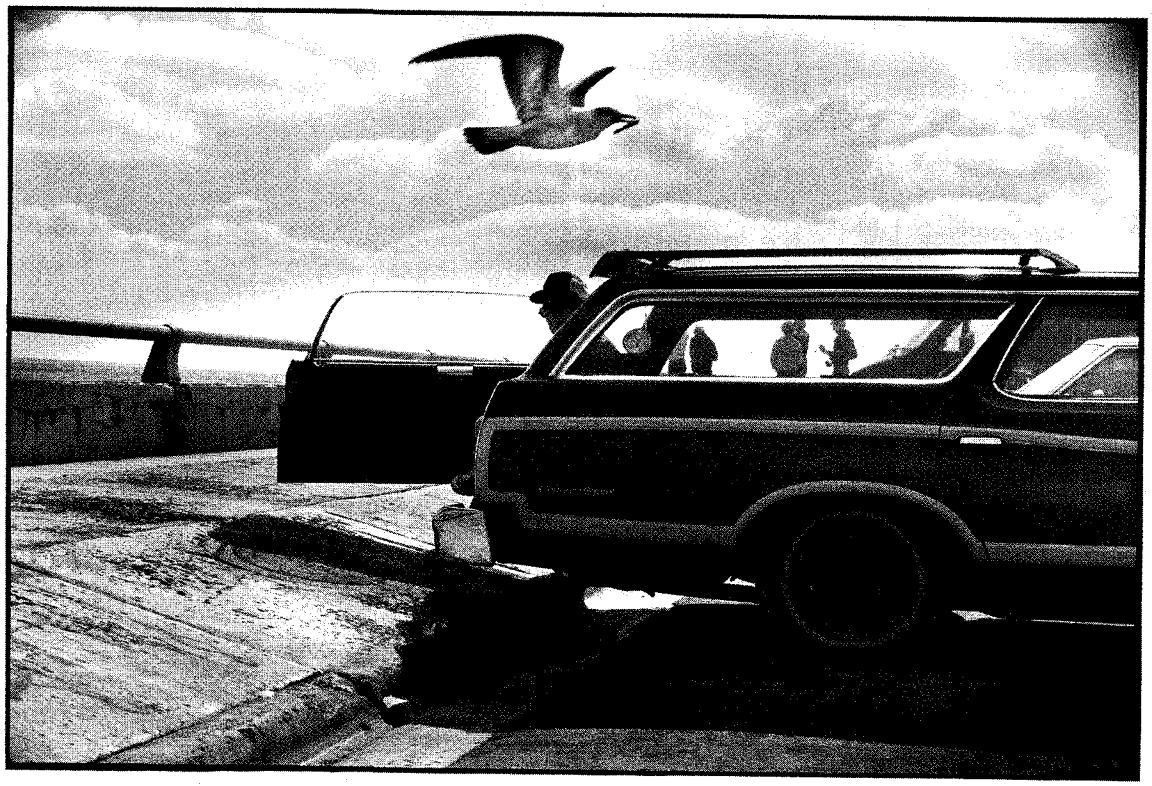
BY DAVID SEDARIS



ELLIOTT ERWITT/MAGNUM

My mother and I were at the dry cleaner's, standing behind a woman we had never seen. "A nice-looking woman," my mother would later say. "Well put together. Classy." The woman was dressed for the season in a light cotton shift patterned with oversize daisies. Her shoes matched the petals and her purse, which was black-and-yellow striped, hung over her shoulder, buzzing the flowers like a lazy bumblebee. She handed in her claim check, accepted her garments, and then expressed gratitude for what she considered to be fast and efficient service. "You know," she said, "people talk about Raleigh but it isn't really true, is it?"

The Korean man nodded, the way you do when you're a foreigner and understand that someone has finished a sentence. He wasn't the owner, just a helper who'd stepped in from the back, and it was clear he had no idea what she was saying.

"My sister and I are visiting from out of town," the woman said, a little louder now, and again the man nodded. "I'd love to stay awhile longer and explore, but my home, well, *one* of my homes is on the garden tour, so I've got to get back to Williamsburg."

I was eleven years old, yet still the statement seemed strange to me. If she'd hoped to impress the Korean, the woman had obviously wasted her breath, so who was this information for?

"My home, well, *one* of my homes"; by the end of the day my mother and I had repeated this line no less than fifty times. The garden tour was unimportant, but the first part of her sentence brought us great pleasure. There was, as indicated by the comma, a pause between the words "home" and "well," a brief moment in which she'd decided, *Oh, why not*? The following word—"one"—had blown from her mouth as if propelled by a gentle breeze, and this was the difficult part. You had to get it just right or else the sentence lost its power. Falling somewhere between a self-conscious laugh and a sigh of happy confusion, the "one" afforded her statement a double meaning. To her peers it meant, "Look at me, I catch myself coming and going!" and to the less fortunate it was a way of saying, "Don't kid yourself, it's a lot of work having more than one house."

The first dozen times we tried it our voices sounded pinched and snobbish, but by midafternoon they had softened. We wanted what this woman had. Mocking her made it seem hopelessly unobtainable, and so we reverted to our natural selves.

"My home, well, one of my homes . . ." My mother said it in a rush, as if she were under pressure to be more specific. It was the same way she said, "My daughter, well, one of my daughters," but a second home was more prestigious than a second daughter, and so it didn't really work. I went in the opposite direction, exaggerating the word "one" in a way that was guaranteed to alienate my listener.

"Say it like that and people are going to be jealous," my mother said.

"Well, isn't that what we want?"

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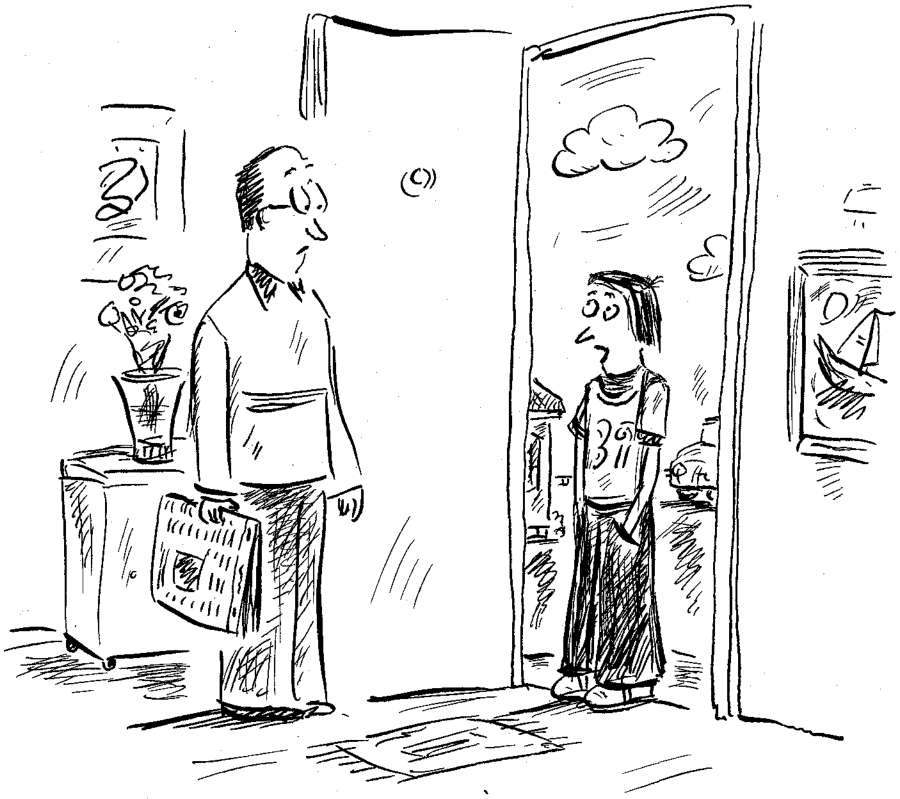

"Can Hilary come out to abstain from having sex?"

• •

"Sort of," she said. "But mainly we want them to be happy for us."

"But why should you be happy for someone who has more than you do?"

"I guess it all depends on the person," she said. "Anyway, I suppose it doesn't matter. We'll get it right eventually. When the day arrives I'm sure it'll just come to us."

And so we waited.

At some point in the mid- to late nineteen-sixties, North Carolina began referring to itself as "Variety Vacationland." The words were stamped onto license plates, and a series of television commercials reminded us that, unlike certain of our neighbors, we had both the beach *and* the mountains. There were those who bounced back and forth between one and the other, but most people tended to choose a landscape and stick to it. We ourselves were Beach People, Emerald Isle People, but that was mainly my mother's doing. I don't think our father would have cared whether he took a vacation or not. Being away from home left him anxious and crabby, but our mother loved the ocean. She couldn't swim, but enjoyed standing at the water's edge with a pole in her hand. It wasn't exactly what you'd call fishing, as she caught nothing and expressed neither hope nor disappointment in regard to her efforts. What she thought about while looking at the waves was a complete mystery, yet you could tell that these thoughts pleased her, and that she liked herself better while thinking them.

One year our father waited too late to make our reservations, and we were forced to take something on the sound. It wasn't a cottage but a run-down house, the sort of place where poor people lived. The yard was enclosed by a chain-link fence and the air was thick with the flies and mosquitoes normally blown away by the ocean breezes. Midway through the vacation a hideous woolly caterpillar fell from a tree and bit my sister Amy on the cheek. Her face swelled and discolored, and within an hour, were it not for her arms and legs, it would have been difficult to recognize her as a human. My mother drove her to the hospital, and when they returned she employed my sister as Exhibit A, pointing as if this were not her daughter but some ugly stranger forced to share our quarters. "*This* is what you get for waiting until the last minute," she said to our father. "No dunes, no waves, just *this*."

From that year on, our mother handled the reservations. We went to Emerald Isle for a week every September and were always oceanfront, a word that suggested a certain degree of entitlement. The oceanfront cottages were on stilts, which made them appear if not large, then at least imposing. Some were painted, some were sided, "Cape Cod style," with wooden shingles, and all of them had names, the cleverest being "Loafer's Paradise." The owners had cut their sign in the shape of two moccasins resting side by side. The shoes were realistically painted and the letters were bloated and listless, loitering like drunks against the soft faux leather.

"Now *that's* a sign," our father would say, and we would agree. There was The Skinny Dipper, Pelican's Perch, Lazy Daze, The Scotch Bonnet, Loony Dunes, the name of each house followed by the name and home town of the owner. "The Duncan Clan—Charlotte," "The Graftons—Rocky Mount," "Hal and Jean Starling of Pinehurst": signs that essentially said, "My home, well, *one* of my homes."

While at the beach, we sensed more than ever that our lives were governed by luck. When we had it—when it was sunny—my sisters and I felt as if we were somehow personally responsible. We were a fortunate family, and therefore everyone around us was allowed to swim and dig in the sand. When it rained, we were unlucky, and stayed indoors to search our souls. "It'll clear after lunch," our mother would say, and we would eat carefully, using the placemats that had brought us luck in the past. When that failed, we would move on to Plan B. "Oh, Mother, you work too hard," we'd say. "Let us do the dishes. Let us sweep sand off the floor." We spoke like children in a fairy tale, hoping our goodness might lure the sun from its hiding place. "You and Father have been so kind to us. Here, let us massage your shoulders."

If by late afternoon it still hadn't

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cleared, my sisters and I would drop the act and turn on one another, searching for the spoiler who had brought us this misfortune. Which of us seemed the least dissatisfied? Who had curled up on a mildewed bed with a book and a glass of chocolate milk, behaving as though the rain were not such a bad thing after all? We would find this person, most often my sister Gretchen, and then we would beat her.

The summer I was twelve, a tropical storm moved up the coast, leaving a sky the same mottled pewter as Gretchen's subsequent bruises, but the following year we started with luck. My father found a golf course that suited him, and for the first time in memory even he seemed to enjoy himself. Relaxing on the deck with a gin-and-tonic, surrounded by his toast-colored wife and children, he admitted that this really wasn't so bad. "I've been thinking, to hell with these rental cottages," he said. "What do you say we skip the middleman and just buy a place?"

He spoke in the same tone he used when promising ice cream. "Who's up for something sweet?" he'd ask, and we'd pile into the car, passing the Tastee-Freez and driving to the grocery store, where he'd buy a block of pus-colored ice milk reduced for quick sale. Experience had taught us not to trust him, but we wanted a beach house so badly it was impossible not to get caught up in the excitement. Even our mother fell for it.

"Do you really mean this?" she asked.

"Absolutely," he said.

The next day, they made an appointment with a real-estate agent in Morehead City. "We'll just be discussing the possibility," my mother said. "It's just a meeting, nothing more." We wanted to join them but they took only Paul, who was two years old and unfit to be left in our company. The morning meeting led to half a dozen viewings, and when they returned my mother's face was so impassive it seemed almost paralyzed. "It-was-fine," she said. "The-real-estate-agent-was-very-nice." We got the idea that she was under oath to keep something to herself, and the effort was causing her actual physical pain.

"It's all right," my father said. "You can tell them."

"Well, we saw this one place in particular," she told us. "Now, it's nothing to get worked up about, but . . . "

"But it's perfect," my father said. "A real beauty, just like your mother here." He came from behind and pinched her on the bottom. She laughed and swatted him with a towel and we witnessed what we would later come to recognize as the rejuvenating power of real estate. It's what fortunate couples turn to when their sex life has faded and they're too pious for affairs. A second car might bring people together for a week or two, but a second home can revitalize a marriage for up to nine months after the closing.

"Oh, Lou," my mother said. "What am I going to do with you?"

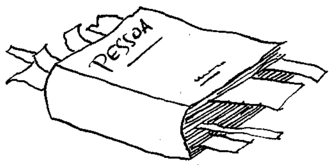
"Whatever you want, Baby," he said. "Whatever you want."

It was queer when people repeated their sentences, but we were willing to overlook it in exchange for a beach house. My mother was too excited to cook that night, and so we ate dinner at the Sanitary Fish Market, in Morehead City. On taking our seats I expected my father to mention inadequate insulation or corroded pipes, the dark undersides of home ownership, but instead he discussed only the positive aspects. "I don't see why we couldn't spend our Thanksgivings here. Hell, we could even come for Christmas. Hang a few lights, get some ornaments, what do you think?"

A waitress passed the table and, without saying please, I demanded another Coke. She went to fetch it and I settled back in my chair, drunk with the power of a second home. When school began my classmates would court me, hoping I might invite them for a weekend, and I would make a game of pitting them against one another. This was what a person did when people liked him for all the wrong reasons, and I would grow to be very good at it.

"What do you think, David?" my father asked. I hadn't heard the question but said that it sounded good to me. "I like it," I said. "I like it."

The following afternoon our parents took us to see the house. "Now, I don't want you to get your hopes up too high," my mother said, but it was too late for that. It was a fifteen-minute drive from one end of the island to the other, and along the way we proposed names for what we had come to think of as our cottage. I'd already given it a good deal of thought but waited a few minutes before offering my suggestion. "Are you ready?" I said. "Our sign will be the silhouette of a ship."



Nobody said anything.

"Get it?" I said. "The shape of a ship. Our house will be called The Ship Shape."

"Well, you'd have to write that on the sign," my father said. "Otherwise nobody will get it."

"But if you write out the words you'll ruin the joke."

"What about The Nut Hut?" Amy said.

"Hey," my father said. "Now, there's an idea." He laughed, not realizing, I guess, that there already was a Nut Hut. We'd passed it a thousand times.

"How about something with the word 'sandpiper' in it?" my mother said. "Everybody likes sandpipers, right?"

Normally I would have hated them for not recognizing my suggestion as the best, but this was clearly a special time and I didn't want to ruin it with brooding. Each of us wanted to be the one who came up with the name, and inspiration could be hiding anywhere. When the interior of the car had been exhausted of ideas, we looked out the windows and searched the passing landscape.

Two thin girls braced themselves before crossing the busy road, hopping from foot to foot on the scalding pavement. "The Tar Heel," Lisa called out. "No, The Wait 'n' Sea. Get it? S-E-A."

A car trailing a motorboat pulled up to a gas pump. "The Shell Station!" Gretchen shouted.

Everything we saw was offered as a possible name, and the resulting list of nominees confirmed that, once you left the shoreline, Emerald Isle was sorely lacking in natural beauty. "The TV Antenna," my sister Tiffany said. "The Telephone Pole." "The Toothless Black Man Selling Shrimp from the Back of His Van."

"The Cement Mixer." "The Over-

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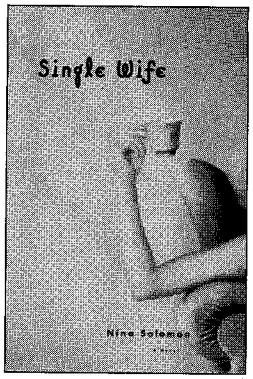

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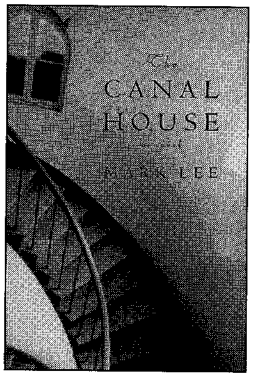

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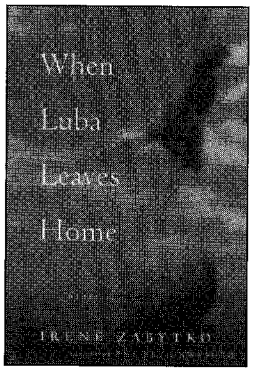

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—*Publishers Weekly*

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turned Grocery Cart." "Gulls on a Garbage Can." My mother inspired "The Cigarette Butt Thrown Out the Window" and suggested we look for ideas on the beach rather than on the highway. "I mean, my God, how depressing can you get?" She acted annoyed, but we could tell she was really enjoying it. "Give me something that suits us," she said. "Give me something that will last."

What would ultimately last were these fifteen minutes on the coastal highway, but we didn't know that then. When older, even the crankiest of us would accept them as proof that we were once a happy family: our mother young and healthy, our father the man who could snap his fingers and give us everything we wanted, the whole lot of us competing to name our good fortune.

The house was, as our parents had promised, perfect. This was an older cottage with pine-panelled walls that gave each room the thoughtful quality of a den. Light fell in strips from the louvred shutters and the furniture, which was included in the sale, reflected the tastes of a distinguished sea captain. Once we'd claimed bedrooms and laid awake all night, mentally rearranging the furniture, it would be our father who'd say, "Now hold on a minute, it's not ours yet." By the next afternoon, he had decided that the golf course wasn't so great after all. Then it rained for two straight days, and he announced that it might be wiser to buy some land, wait a few years, and think about building a place of our own. "I mean, let's be practical." Our mother put on her raincoat. She tied a plastic bag over her head and stood at the water's edge, and for the first time in our lives we knew exactly what she was thinking.

By our final day of vacation our father had decided that instead of building a place on Emerald Isle we should improve the home we already had. "Maybe add a pool," he said. "What do you kids think about that?" Nobody answered.

By the time he finished wheedling it down, the house at the beach had become a bar in the basement. It looked just like a real bar, with tall stools and nooks for wine. There was a sink for washing glasses and an assortment of cartoon napkins illustrating the lighter side of alcoholism. For a week or two my sisters and I tottered at the counter, pretending to be drunks, but then the novelty wore off and we forgot all about it.

On subsequent vacations, both with and without our parents, we would drive by the cottage we had once thought of as our own. Each of us referred to it by a different name, and over time qualifiers became necessary. ("You know, *our* house.") The summer after we didn't buy it, the new owners, or "those people," as we liked to call them, painted The Ship Shape yellow. In the late seventies, Amy noted that The Nut Hut had extended the carport and paved the driveway. Lisa was relieved when the Wait 'n' Sea returned to its original color and Tiffany was incensed when The Toothless Black Man Selling Shrimp from the Back of His Van sported a sign endorsing Jesse Helms in the 1984 senatorial campaign. Five years later my mother called to report that The Sandpiper had been badly damaged by Hurricane Hugo. "It's still there," she said, "but barely." Shortly thereafter, according to Gretchen, The Shell Station was torn down and sold as a vacant lot.

I know that such a story does not quite work to inspire sympathy. ("My home, well, *one* of my homes fell through.") We had no legitimate claim to self-pity, were ineligible even to hold a grudge, but that didn't stop us from complaining.

In the coming years, our father would continue to promise what he couldn't deliver, and in time we grew to think of him as an actor auditioning for the role of a benevolent millionaire. He'd never get the part but liked the way that the words felt in his mouth. "What do you say to a new car?" he'd ask. "Who's up for a cruise to the Greek isles?" In response he expected us to play the part of an enthusiastic family, but we were unwilling to resume our old roles. As if carried by a tide, our mother drifted further and further away, first to twin beds and then down the hall to a room decorated with seascapes and baskets of sun-bleached sand dollars. It would have been nice, a place at the beach, but we already had a home. A home with a bar. Besides, had things worked out you wouldn't have been happy for us. We're not that kind of people. ♦

Starfish days, starlit nights.
Only seven years old, I was the Belle of the Beach.
I dreamed of returning as one
of the ladies in big round sunglasses.
Here I am.

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PERSONAL HISTORY

CAUGHT

Late nights on the high-school roof.

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

Kortenhof had heard of a high school where pranksters had put an automobile tire over the top of a thirty-foot flagpole, like a ring on a finger, and this seemed to him an impressive and elegant and beautiful feat that we at our high school ought to try to duplicate. Kortenhof was the son of a lawyer, and he had a lawyerly directness and a perpetual crocodile smile that made him fun company, if a little scary. Every day at lunch hour, he led us outside to gaze at the flagpole and to hear his latest thoughts about accessorizing it with steel-belted radial tires. (Steel-belted radials, he said, would be harder for administrators to remove.) Eventually we all agreed that this was an exciting technical challenge worthy of a heavy investment of our time and energy.

The flagpole, which was forty feet tall, stood on an apron of concrete near the high school's main entrance, on Selma Avenue. It was too thick at the base to be shinned up easily, and a fall from the top could be fatal. None of us had access to an extension ladder longer than twenty feet. We talked about building some sort of catapult, how spectacular a catapult would be, but airborne car tires were sure to do serious damage if they missed their mark, and cops patrolled Selma too frequently for us to risk getting caught with heavy equipment, assuming we could ever build it.

The school itself could be a ladder, though. The roof was only six feet lower than the ball at the flagpole's crown, and we knew how to get to the roof. My friend Davis and I volunteered to build a Device, consisting of ropes and a pulley and a long board, that would convey a tire from the roof to the pole and drop it over. If the Device didn't work, we could try lassoing the pole with a rope, standing on a stepladder for added elevation, and sliding a tire down the rope. If this failed as well, it still might be possible, with a lot of luck, to gang-Frisbee a tire up and out and over.

Six of us—Kortenhof, Davis, Manley, Schroer, Peppel, and me—met up near the high school on a Friday night in March. Davis came with a stepladder on top of his parents' Pinto station wagon. There had been some trouble at home when his father saw the ladder, but Davis, who was smarter and less kindhearted than his parent, had explained that the ladder belonged to Manley.

"Yes, but what are you doing with it?"

"Dad, it's Ben's ladder."

"I know, but what are you doing with it?"

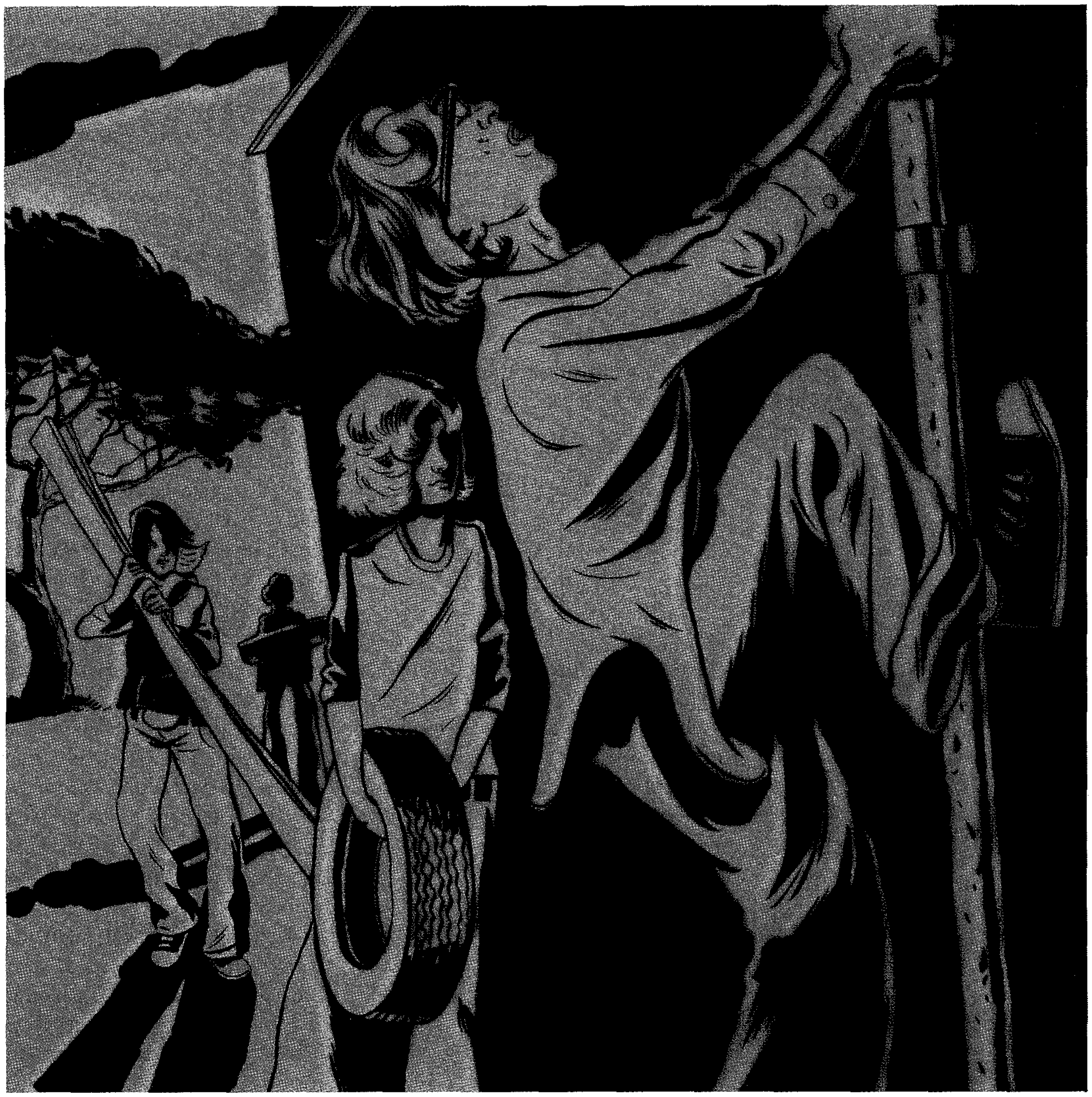
"I just said! It's Ben's ladder!"

"Christopher, I heard you the first time. I want to know what you're doing with it."

"God! Dad! It's *Ben's ladder*. How many times do I have to tell you? It's *Ben's ladder*."

To get to the main roof, you climbed a long, sturdy downspout near the music rooms, crossed a plain of tar and caramel-brown St. Louis gravel, and climbed a metal staircase and a sheer eight-foot wall. Unless you were me, you also had to stop and drag me up the eight-foot wall. The growth spurt I'd had the year before had made me taller and heavier and clumsier while leaving unaltered my pitiful arm and shoulder strength.

I was probably nobody's idea of an ideal fellow gang member, but I came with Manley and Davis, my best friends, who were good athletes and avid climbers of public buildings. In junior high, Manley had broken the school record for pullups, doing twenty-three of them. As for Davis, he'd been a football halfback and a starting basketball forward and was unbelievably tough. Once, on a January campout in a deserted Missouri state park, on a morning so cold we split frozen grapefruits with a hatchet and fried them over an open fire (we were in a phase of cook-it-yourself fruit-



ZOHAR LAZAR

arianism), we found an old car hood with a towrope attached to it, irresistible, irresistible. We tied the rope to our friend Lunte's Travelall, and Lunte drove at ill-considered speeds along the unplowed park roads, towing Davis while I kept watch from the back seat. We were doing about forty when the road plunged unexpectedly down a hill. Lunte had to brake hard and steer into a skid to avoid rolling the Travelall, which cracked the towrope like a whip and flung Davis at a sick-making velocity toward a line of heavy-duty picnic tables stacked up in falling-domino formation. It was the kind of collision that killed people. There was a sunlit explosion of sparkling powder and shattered lumber, and through the rear window, as the snow settled and Lunte slowed the vehicle, I saw Davis come trotting after us, limping a little and clutching a jagged shard of picnic table. He was shouting, he said later, "I'm alive! I'm alive!" He'd demolished one of the frozen tables—knocked it into a hundred pieces—with his ankle.

Also dragged to the roof, along with me, were the stepladder, lots of rope, two bald steel-belted radials, and the Device that Davis and I had built. Leaning out over the balustrade, we could sort of almost *touch* the flagpole. The object of our fixation wasn't more than twelve feet away from us, but its skin of aluminum paint matched the cloudy bright suburban sky behind it, and it was curiously hard to see. The six of us stood there wishing we could touch it, groaning and exclaiming with desire to touch it.

Although Davis was a better mechanic, I was more facile than he at arguing for doing things my way. As a result, little we built ever worked. Certainly our Device, as soon became apparent, had no chance. At the end of the board was a crude wooden bracket that could never have gripped the flagpole, especially under the added weight of a tire; there was also the more fundamental difficulty of leaning out over a balustrade and pulling hard on a heavy board to control it while also trying to push it against a flagpole that, when it was bumped, clanged and swung distressingly. We were lucky not to send the Device through a window on one of the floors below us. The group verdict was swift and harsh: *piece of shit.*

I laughed and said it, too: *piece of shit.* But I went off to one side, my throat thick with disappointment, and stood alone while everybody else tried the lasso. Peppel was swinging his hips like a rodeo man.

"Yee haw!"

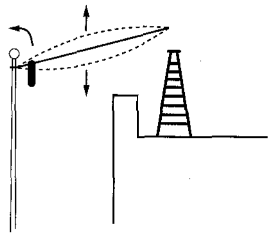
"John-Boy, gimme that lasso."

"Yee haw!"

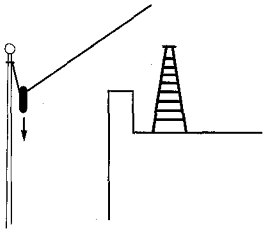
Over the balustrade I could see the dark trees of Webster Groves and the more distant TV-tower lights that marked the boundaries of my childhood. A night wind coming across the football practice field carried the smell of thawed winter earth, the great sorrowful world-smell of being alive beneath a sky. In my imagination, as in the pencil drawings I'd made, I'd seen the Device work brilliantly. The contrast between the brightness of my dreams and the utter botch of my executions, the despair into which this contrast plunged me, was a recipe for self-consciousness. I felt identified with the disgraced Device. I was tired and cold and I wanted to go home.

I'd grown up amid tools, with a father who could build anything, and I thought I could do anything myself. How difficult could it be to drill a straight hole through a piece of wood? I would bear down with the utmost concentration, and the drill bit would emerge in a totally wrong place on the underside of the wood, and I would be shocked. Always. Shocked. In tenth grade, I set out to build from scratch a refracting telescope with an equatorial mount and tripod, and my father, seeing the kind of work I was doing, took pity on me and built the entire thing himself. He cut threads in iron pipe for the mounting, poured concrete in a coffee can for the counterweight, hacksawed an old carbon-steel bedframe for the base of the tripod, and made a gorgeous lens mount out of galvanized sheet metal, machine screws, and pieces of a plastic ice-cream carton. The only part of the telescope I built on my own was the eyepiece holder, which was the only part that didn't work right, which rendered the rest of it practically useless. And so I hated being young.

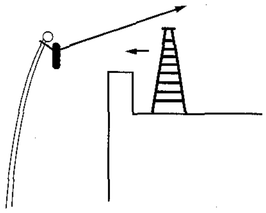
It was after one o'clock when Peppel finally threw the lasso high and far enough to capture the flagpole. I stopped sulking and joined in the general cheering. But new difficulties emerged right away. Kortenhof climbed the stepladder and tugged the lasso up to within a foot of the ball, but here it snagged on the pulley and flag cables. The only way to propel a tire over the top would be to snap the rope vigorously up and down:



When we strung the tire out on the rope, however, it sagged out of reach of the top:



To raise the tire, Kortenhof had to pull hard on the rope, which, if you were standing on a ladder, was a good way to launch yourself over the balustrade. Four of us grabbed the ladder and applied counterforce. But this then wildly stressed the flagpole itself:



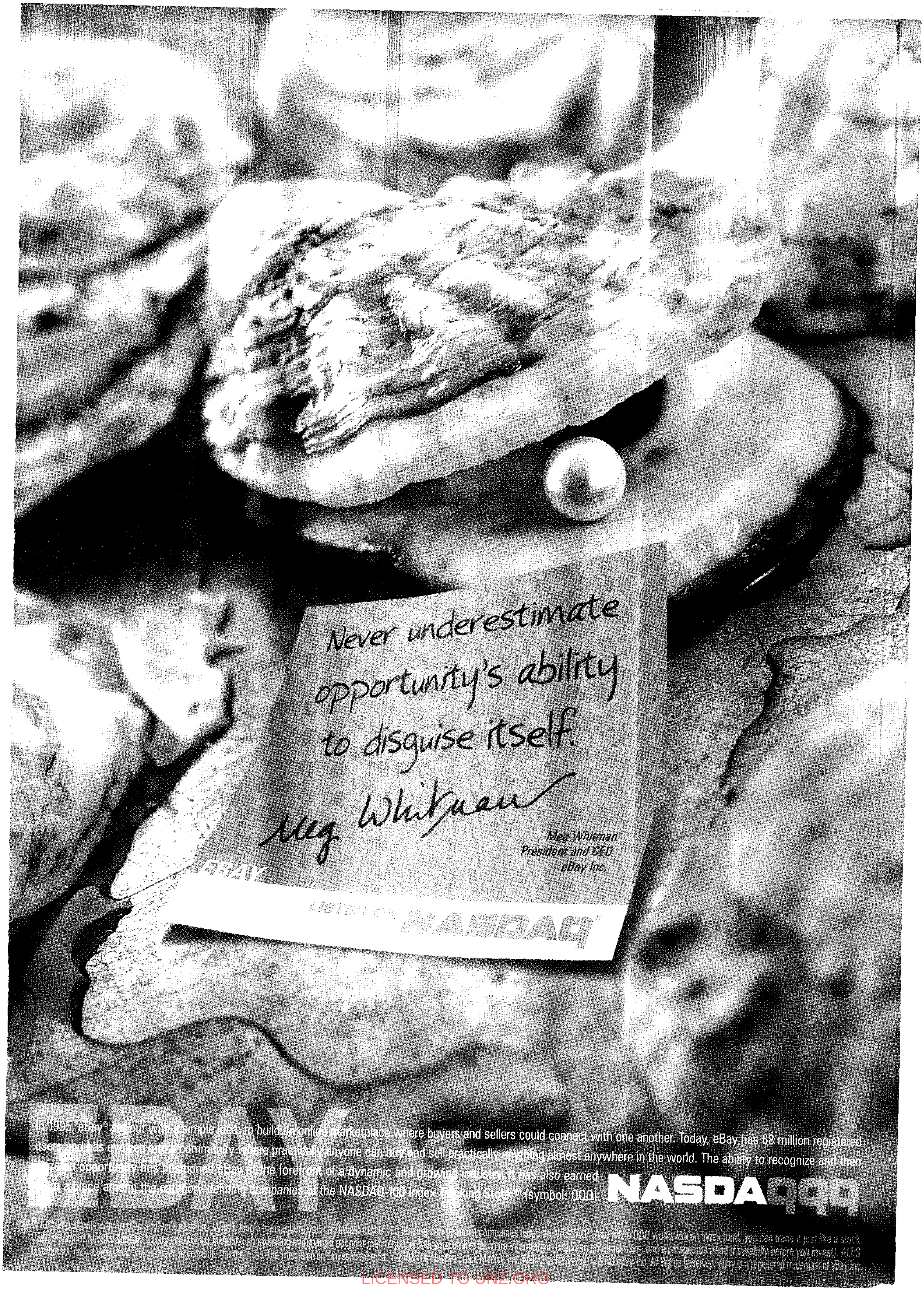
The flagpole, which was of a certain age, made ominous creaking and popping sounds as it leaned toward us. It also threatened, in the manner of a strained fishing rod, to recoil and cast Kortenhof out over Selma Avenue like a piece of bait. We were thwarted yet again. Our delight in seeing a tire rubbing up against the desired ball, nudging to within inches of the wished-for penetration, only heightened our anguish.

Two months earlier, around the time of her fifteenth birthday, my first-ever girlfriend, M—, had dumped me hard. She was a brainy girl with coltish corduroy legs and straight brown hair that reached to the wallet in her back pocket. (Purses, she believed, were girlish and anti-feminist.) We'd come together on a church-membership retreat in a country house where I'd unrolled my sleeping bag in a carpeted closet into which M— and her own sleeping bag had then migrated by deliriously slow degrees. In the months that followed, M— had tactlessly corrected my most egregious mannerisms and my most annoying misconceptions about girls, and sometimes she'd let me kiss her. We held hands through the entirety of my first R-rated movie, Lina Wertmüller's "Swept Away," which two feminist advisers from our church took a group of us to see for somewhat opaque political reasons. ("Sex but not explicit," I noted in my journal.) Then, in January, possibly in reaction to my obsessive tendencies, M— got busy with other friends and began to avoid me. She applied for transfer to a local private academy for the gifted and the well-to-do. Mystified, and badly hurt, I renounced what I called the "stagnation" of romantic attachments.

Although the flagpole situation was hopeless, Kortenhof and Schroer were yanking the rope more violently, causing the pole to lurch and shudder while the worriers among us—Manley and I—told them to stop. Finally, inevitably, somebody lost hold of the rope, and we all went home with a new problem: if the rope was still in place on Monday morning, the administration would guess what we'd been up to.

Returning the next night, Saturday, we smashed the padlock at the base of the pole, released the flag cables, and tried to jostle the rope free by tugging on the cables, with no success. The once stiff rope dangled flaccidly alongside the unconquered administrative mast, its frayed end twisting in the wind, twenty feet off the ground. We came back on Sunday night with a new padlock and took turns trying to shinny up the too-thick pole, again with no success. Most of us gave up then—we may have had homework, and Schroer was heavily into "Monty Python," which aired at eleven—but Manley and Davis returned to the school yet again and managed to release the rope by boosting each other and yanking on the cables. They put our padlock on the flagpole; and now it was our hostage.

Manley's parents were extremely permissive, and Kortenhof's house was big enough to exit and enter inconspicuously, but most of us had trouble getting away from our parents after midnight. One Sunday morning, after two hours of sleep, I came down to break-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fast and found my parents ominously untalkative. My father was at the stove frying our weekly pre-church eggs. My mother was frowning with what I now realize was probably more fear than disapproval. There was fear in her voice as well. "Dad says he heard you coming in the front door this morning after it was light," she said. "It must have been six o'clock. Were you out?"

Caught! I'd been Caught!

"Yeah," I said. "Yeah, I was over at the park with Ben and Chris."

"You said you were going to bed early. Your light was off."

"Yeah," I said, looking at the floor. "But I couldn't sleep, and they'd said they'd be over at the park, you know, if I couldn't sleep."

"What on earth were you doing out there so long?"

"Irene," my father warned, from the stove. "Don't ask the question if you can't stand to hear the answer."

"Just talking," I said.

The sensation of being Caught: it was like the buzz I once got from some cans of Reddi-wip whose gas propellant I shared with Manley and Davis—a ballooning, dizzying sensation of being all surface, my inner self suddenly so flagrant and gigantic that it seemed to force the air from my lungs and the blood from my head.

I associate this sensation with the rushing heave of a car engine, the low whoosh of my mother's Buick as it surged with alarming, incredible speed up our driveway and into our garage. It was in the nature of this whoosh that I always heard it earlier than I wanted or expected to. I was Caught privately enjoying myself, usually in the living room, listening to music, and I had to scramble.

Our stereo was housed in a mahogany-stained console of the kind sold nowadays in thrift stores. Its brand name was Aeolian, and its speakers were hidden behind doors that my mother insisted on keeping closed when she played the local all-Muzak station, KCFM, for her dinner guests; orchestral arrangements of "Penny Lane" and "Cherish" fought through cabinetry in a muffled whisper, the ornate pendent door handles buzzing with voices during KCFM's half-hourly commercial announcements. When I was alone in the house, I opened the doors and played my own records, mostly hand-me-downs from my brothers. My two favorite bands in those pre-punk years were the Grateful Dead and the Moody Blues. (My enthusiasm for the latter survived until I read, in a *Rolling Stone* review, that their music was suited to "the kind of person who whispers 'I love you' to a one-night stand.") One afternoon, I was kneeling at the Aeolian altar and playing an especially syrupy Moodies effort at such soul-stirring volume that I failed to hear my mother's automotive whoosh. She burst into the house crying, "Turn that off! That awful rock music! I can't stand it! Turn it off!" Her complaint was unjust; the song, which had no rock beat whatsoever, offered KCFM-ish sentiments like "Isn't life strange? / A turn of the page . . . It makes me want to cry." But I nevertheless felt hugely Caught.

The car I preferred hearing was my father's car, the Cougar he commuted to work in, because it never showed up unexpectedly. My father understood privacy, and he was eager to accept the straight-A self that I presented to him. He was my rational and enlightened ally, the powerful engineer who helped me man the dikes against the ever-invading sea of my mother. And yet, by temperament, he was no less hostile to my adolescence than she was.

My father was plagued by the suspicion that adolescents were *getting away with something:* that their pleasures were insufficiently trammelled by conscience and responsibility. My older brothers had borne the brunt of his resentment, but even with me it would sometimes boil over in pronouncements on my character. He said, "You have demonstrated a taste for expensive things, but not for the work it takes to earn them." He said, "Friends are fine, but all evening every evening is too much." He had a phrase that he couldn't stop repeating whenever he came home from work and found me reading a novel or playing with my friends: "One continuous round of pleasure!"

At church, I knew a poetic girl named Fawn, who lived in a different school district. When I was fifteen, she and I struck up a poetic correspondence, and one Sunday in the summer she came home with us after church and spent the afternoon with me. We walked over to my old elementary school and played in the dirt: made little dirt roads, bark bridges, and twig cottages on the ground beneath a tree. Fawn's friends at her school were doing the ordinary cool things—drinking, experimenting with sex and drugs—that I wasn't. I was scared of Fawn's beauty and her savoir-faire and was relieved to discover that she and I shared romantic views of childhood. We

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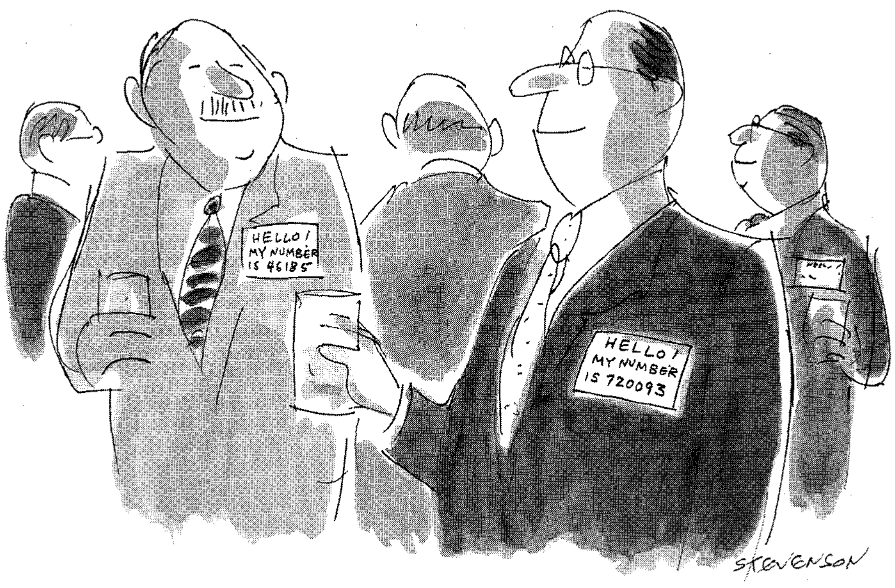

were old enough not to be ashamed of playing like little kids, young enough to still become engrossed in it. By the end of our afternoon, I was about ready to whisper "I love you." I thought it was maybe four o'clock, but when we got back to my house we found Fawn's father waiting in his car. It was six-fifteen, and he'd been waiting for an hour. "Oops," Fawn said.

"Those are the books I never had a chance to finish, and those are the books I never had a chance to start."

Inside the house, my dinner was cold on the table. My parents (this was unprecedented) had eaten without me. My mother flickered into sight and said, "Your father has something to say to you before you sit down."

I went to the den, where he had his briefcase open on his lap. Without looking up, he announced, "You are not to see Fawn again."

"What?"

"You and she were gone for five hours. Her father wanted to know where you were. I had to tell him I had no idea."

"We were just over at Clark School."

"You will not see her again."

"Why not?"

"Calpurnia is above suspicion," he said. "You are not."

Calpurnia? Suspicion?

Later that evening, my father, having cooled off, came to my room and told me that I could see Fawn again if I wanted to. But I'd already got the message. I began to send asinine and hurtful letters to Fawn, and I began to lie constantly to my father as well as to my mother. I'd seen what happened in the late sixties, when my brothers openly rebelled; I'd heard the shouting, and then, when my brothers were gone, I'd seen how sad and confused my parents were. For a while, at least, I could avoid open conflict by manufacturing two versions of myself: the official fifty-year-old boy and the unofficial adolescent. The unofficial adolescent never did anything particularly bad; what mattered was having something, anything, to conceal.

The misery of appearances was a main lesson of my childhood. There came a time in tenth grade when my mother asked me why all my undershirts were developing holes at navel level. The official version of me had no answer, but the unofficial adolescent did. In 1974, at my high school, crewneck white undershirts were fashion death, but my mother came from an old-fashioned world in which colored T-shirts were evidently on a moral par with water beds and roach clips, and she refused to let me wear them. Every morning, therefore, after I left the house, I pulled down my undershirt until it didn't show at the collar, and I safety-pinned it to my underpants. (More than once, pins opened and stuck me in the belly.) When I could get away with it, I also went to the boys' bathroom and changed out of certain grievously bad shirts. My mother, in her thrift, favored inexpensive tab-collared knits, usually of polyester, which advertised me equally as an obedient little boy and a middle-aged golfer, and which chafed my neck as if to keep me ever mindful of the shame of wearing them.

For four years, from seventh through tenth grade, my social failure was grossly overdetermined—I had a large vocabulary, a giddily squeaking voice, horn-rimmed glasses, poor arm strength, too-obvious approval from my teachers, irresistible urges to shout unfunny puns, a near-eidetic acquaintance with J. R. R. Tolkien, a big chemistry lab in my basement, a penchant for intimately insulting any girl unwise enough to speak to me, and so on—but the real cause of my failure, as I saw it, was my mother's refusal to let me wear jeans or sneakers to school. Manley, my old friend, remained cordial to me in the classes we shared, but he wore jeans and painter's coveralls and played drums and could do twenty-three pullups, and after he was elected class president he would have needed Christlike charity not to shun me socially.

Help, when it finally came, was the result of two lucky compromises. In tenth grade, I discovered straight-legged Levi's corduroys, which cleared the radar on all fronts, and I became more active in the youth fellowship at the Congregational church. I'd joined the fellowship in seventh grade, because I hated Boy Scouts and my parents insisted that I belong to something. By the mid-seventies, the senior-high fellowship was a vortex of cigarette smoke, acoustic guitars, faded denim, social activism, and pretty girls. At its peak, under the leadership of the charismatic Reverend Bob Mutton, it had a hundred and fifty members, most of them from other churches. Kortenhof defected to us from the Episcopalians, Manley from the Unitarians. The

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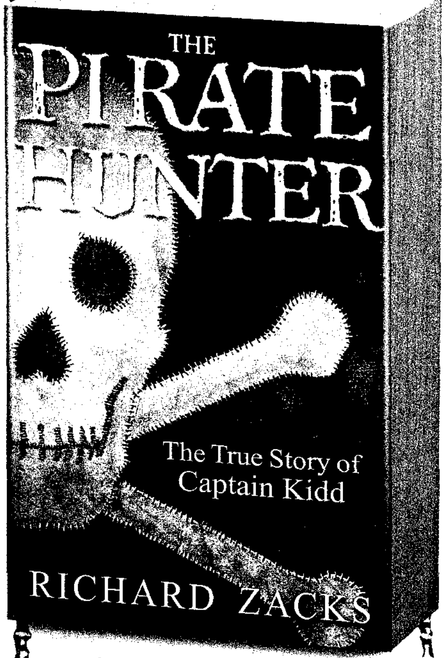

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fellowship crowd was suddenly an in-crowd, and I, through sheer dumb luck, was in. I grew six inches in six months. After years of marginal lunching in school cafeterias, I found a home at one of the crowded fellowship tables, presided over by Peppel, Kortenhof, and Schroer.

At lunch on Monday, Kortenhof gleefully reported that our padlock was still on the flagpole and that the Stars and Stripes had not been raised. (It was 1976, and the high school was lax in its patriotic duties.) The obvious next step, Kortenhof said, was to form a proper group and demand official recognition. So we wrote a note—

> Dear Sir,
> We have kidnapped your flagpole. Further details later.

—made a quick decision to sign it “U.N.C.L.E.,” and delivered it to the mail slot of the high-school principal, Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight was a red-haired, red-bearded, Nordic-looking giant. He had a sideways, slightly shambling way of walking, with frequent pauses to hitch up his pants, and he stood with the stooped posture of a man who spent his days listening to smaller people. We knew his voice from his all-school intercom announcements. His first words—“Teachers, excuse the interruption”—often sounded strained, as if he'd been nervously hesitating at his microphone, but after that his cadences were gentle and offhanded.

What the six of us wanted, more than anything else, was to be recognized by Mr. Knight as kindred spirits, as players outside the ordinary sphere of student misbehavior and administrative force. And for a week our frustration steadily mounted, because Mr. Knight remained aloof from us, as impervious as the flagpole (which, in our correspondence, we liked to represent as personally his).

After school on Monday, we cut and pasted words and letters from magazines:

> WE rEspect*FULL*y dEmanD that YOU offIcIallY ReCoGnize *our* ORganization AT 2:30 PM tuESday. BEGIN with “tEACHers, EXcUse the interRuption . . .” if properLY dONE, we will re*TURN* fLAgpole someTIME wED.
> U.n.C.L.E.

The phrase “Teachers, excuse the interruption” was Manley's idea, a poke at Mr. Knight. But Manley was also worried, as was I, that the administration would crack down hard on our little group if we got a reputation for vandalism, and so we returned to school that night with a can of aluminum paint and repaired the damage we'd done to the flagpole in hammering the old lock off. In the morning, we delivered the ransom note, and two-thirty found the six of us, in our respective classrooms, unreasonably hoping that Mr. Knight would make an announcement.

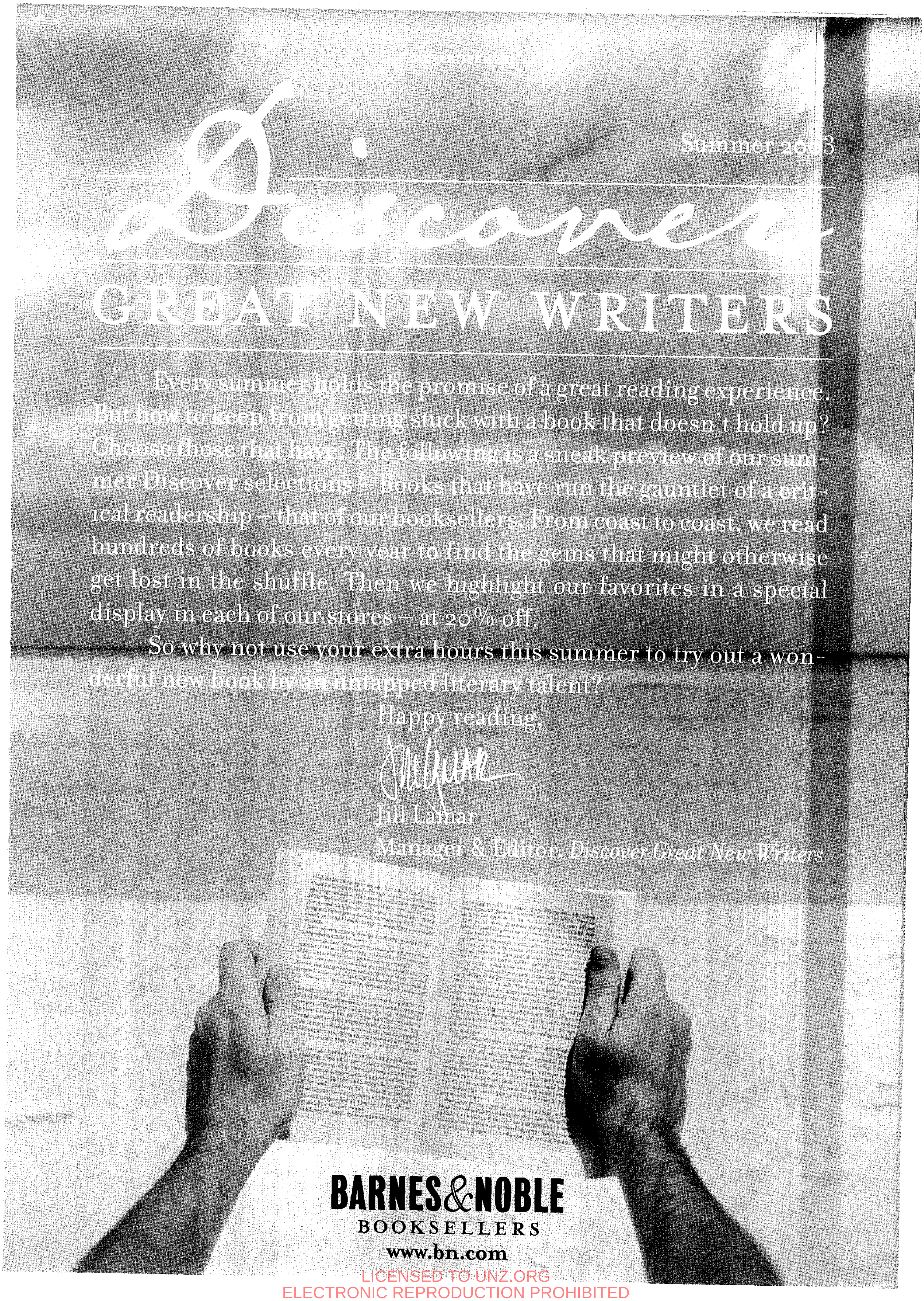
Our third note was typed on a sheet of notepaper headed with a giant avocado-green HELLO:

> Being as we are a brotherhood of kindly fellows, we are giving you one last chance. And observing that you have not complied with our earlier request, we are hereby reiterating it. To wit: your official recognition of our organization over the public address system at 2:59, Wednesday, March 17. If you comply, your flagpole will be returned by Thursday morning.
> U.N.C.L.E.

We also made an U.N.C.L.E. flag out of a pillowcase and black electrician's tape and ran it up the flagpole under cover of night. But Mr. Knight's office didn't even notice the flag until we pointed it out to teachers—two maintenance workers were then sent outside to cut our lock with a hacksaw and lower the pirate flag—and he ignored the note. He ignored a fourth note, which offered him two dollars in compensation for the broken school padlock. He ignored a fifth note, in which we reiterated our offer and dispelled any notion that our flag had been raised in celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

By the end of the week, the only interest we'd succeeded in attracting was that of other students. There had been too much huddling and conspiring in hallways, too much blabbing on Kortenhof's part. We added a seventh member simply to buy his silence. A couple of girls from the fellowship grilled me closely: Flagpole? Uncle? Can we join?

As the whispering grew louder, and as Kortenhof developed a new plan for a much more ambitious and outstanding prank, we decided to rename ourselves. Manley, who had a half-insolent, half-genuine fondness for really stupid humor, proposed the name DIOTI. He wrote it down and showed it to me.



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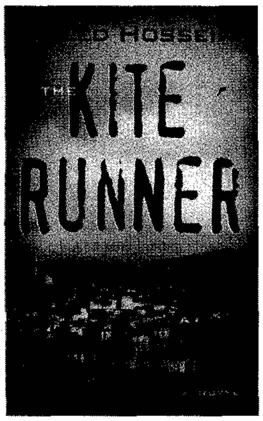

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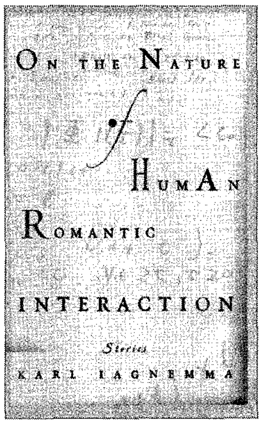
"I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975." So begins *The Kite Runner*, a poignant tale of two motherless boys growing up in Kabul, a city teetering on the brink of destruction at the dawn of the Soviet invasion. Despite their class differences, Amir, the son of a wealthy businessman, and Hassan, his devoted sidekick and the son of Amir's household servant, play together, cause mischief together, and compete in the annual kite-fighting tournament – Amir flying the kite, and Hassan running down the kites they fell. But one day, Amir betrays Hassan, and his betrayal grows increasingly devastating as their tale continues. Amir will spend much of his life coming to terms with his initial and subsequent acts of cowardice, and finally seeks to make reparations. Hosseini's depiction of the cruelty children suffer at the hands of their "friends" will break your heart. And his descriptions of Afghanistan both before and after the war will haunt readers long after they've read the last page. *The Kite Runner* is a stunning reminder that the dark hearts of adults are made, step-by-step, by the hatred they learn as children, and that all it takes for evil to triumph is for a good man to stand back and do nothing. RIVERHEAD



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On the Nature of Human Romantic Interaction – *Karl Iagnemma*

Sometimes it seems impossible that the insight certain young writers evidence in their craft could have come without decades of life experience. Karl Iagnemma's richly compelling book of relationship tales is the work of one such writer. In his collection of eight startlingly unique stories, he explores the nature of love in all its deeply flawed complexity. The title story sets the theme of this research scientist's book: A university mathematician tries to explain love by formula, using linear equations. A victim of unrequited love, he moves to a warmer region, hoping to draw connections between love and geography or climate. In "The Confessional Approach," an artist sells out to support an errant lover. And in the disturbing and suspenseful "Children of Hunger," based on a true story, the lonely wife of a frontier doctor watches as he conducts live experiments on a young man who has had much of his abdomen shot away. Common throughout each of these stories is the notion that to love is to put oneself in a solitary place, where the battle for happiness must be fought alone, often in silence. For readers who enjoyed Discover Award winner Anthony Doerr's *The Shell Collector*, take note: In Karl Iagnemma, we have found a similarly precocious talent. THE DIAL PRESS

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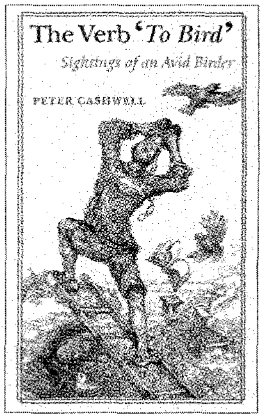
The Verb 'To Bird' – *Peter Cashwell*

Peter Cashwell loves birds with a passion that drives him into forests and swamps, often before dawn, to search out his quarry and to add new species to his growing list of sightings. It is this avian compulsion, too, that renders this English teacher's descriptions of his prey so heartfelt and clever, evoking passages of F. Scott Fitzgerald. *The Verb 'To Bird'* is a wildly entertaining look into the world of birders that promises not to take itself too seriously. Told through personal anecdotes that range from his own backyard in the hills of Virginia to trips in search of a particular species, Cashwell includes plenty of screeching-to-a-halt and grabbing-of-the-binoculars on the roadway in between. Throughout, he provides a historical perspective on man's intervention in the natural world and the introduction of certain avian species to the U.S. From his description of birds and their surroundings, Cashwell draws lovely metaphors for modern life and raises questions – some serious, others more whimsical – about the importance of leaving our world a better place with each passing generation. "Reading this book was the next best thing to wandering in the woods with Peter Cashwell...No, it was better – I could laugh out loud...without fear of scaring the birds."– Katharine Weber, author of *The Music Lesson* PAUL DRY BOOKS



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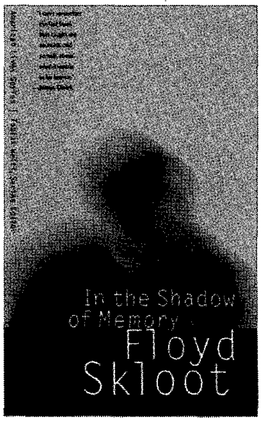
In 1988, Floyd Skloot contracted a brain virus, severely affecting his ability to think clearly and function in the world. "Overnight, [he] was geezered." But rather than sinking into isolation, Skloot spent years painstakingly writing this heroic collection of essays about his experience, and the result is astonishing. Combining a novelist's eye with a remarkable compassion for a public uncomfortable with the disabled, the result is anything but dour – Skloot's fusion of his personal journey with accessible, yet fascinating, scientific research is insightful, moving, and downright humorous. Like a pointillist, Skloot hones each detail of what he describes as his "spiral of lostness." First he delves into the physical reality of his brain damage, but he forges deeper still into his own past to reconstruct his identity. In his investigations, Skloot discovers childhood abuse at the hands of his mother may have caused his brain to be more susceptible to the virus. But he isn't interested in laying blame. On the contrary, Skloot grows closer to his mother as she loses her own identity to Alzheimer's disease, to which he can relate all too well. Incredibly, he sees his own catastrophic event as an opportunity to live richly in a new way, and in doing so, is an inspiration to us all. UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS



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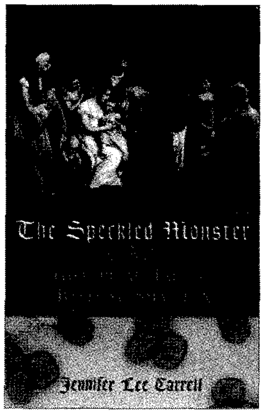
The Speckled Monster – *Jennifer Lee Carrell*

Carrell takes readers back to the early-18th century in this dramatic history of two epidemics – one in London, and one in Boston – and of the people who would change the way in which doctors would tackle and eventually conquer civilization's most feared disease: smallpox. As far back as the early 1700s, important aspects of the disease were already understood: Those who contracted smallpox and survived would not become reinfected; but among those who had not yet been exposed, it was extraordinarily contagious. *The Speckled Monster* weaves a remarkable tale of two heroic individuals in the war against the spotted beast: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the maverick wife of one of Britain's wealthiest men; and Zabdiel Boylston, a Boston "doctor" without formal training or medical degree. These brave and iconoclastic figures would bring scorn and danger upon themselves, their families and their associates by shunning the elitist views of physicians and embracing a "folk remedy" long employed in Eastern and African countries: inoculation. Modern-day vaccinations remain humanity's best weapon against the disease, should it ever surface again. And they're the lasting legacy of two people who were willing to eschew social mores and snobbery in favor of accepting knowledge from any source – and to defy considerable adversaries in order to use it. DUTTON



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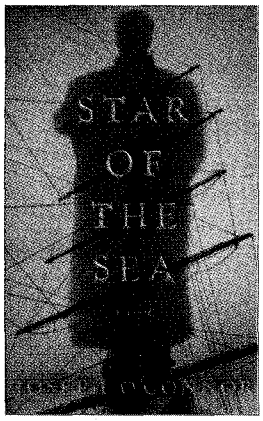

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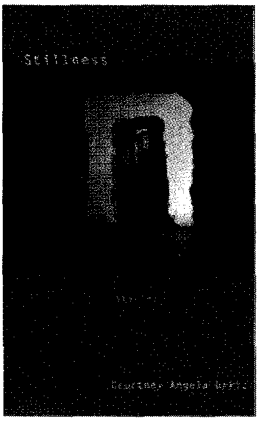
Star of the Sea – *Joseph O'Connor*

Fans of Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* and Sheri Holman's *The Dress Lodger* will find themselves enthralled with this seafaring journey from the Emerald Isle across the Atlantic. Brimming with exquisitely rendered characters and historical detail, this captivating tale of mystery and murder combines equal parts literary novel, historical epic, and thriller to create a muscular work of fiction with a surprising sense of page-turning urgency. Making its wintry voyage from Ireland to New York in 1847, the "Star of the Sea" is a ship filled with passengers whose backgrounds range from the destitute fleeing the ravages of the Irish potato famine to bankrupt aristocrats trying to outrun the secrets of their past. But beneath these class differences lies a web of connections marked by betrayal and hatred that spans generations and is about to turn murderous. Narrated by a fictitious journalist for the *New York Times*, O'Connor's novel is adroitly interspersed with interviews and reportage of the 26-day journey. A literary star across the Atlantic, O'Connor splashes onto our shores with this considerable evidence of his literary gifts, an epic feast of a novel revealing impeccable language skills and an ear for dialogue, combined with a wonderful attention to detail and subtle nuances. HARCOURT



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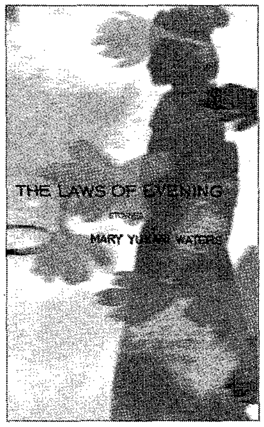
Stillness – *Courtney Angela Brkic*

Out of the ashes of the brutal war that raged in the former Yugoslavia arises this vivid debut story collection. Most of what we've heard from the war are mind numbing reports of body counts and damage assessments that seek to contain the suffering that occurred. But Courtney Brkic has written a work of fiction that makes the human tragedy of the war painfully real, in a way no news report or statistic possibly could. Her stories, filled with searing accounts of atrocity and horror as well as incredible human endurance, provide a powerful testament to the wide array of lives destroyed or forever altered by war. In *Stillness*, we read about the daughters of war criminals, refugees struggling to make a new home in a strange land, and those physically and emotionally scarred by the war, including an amputee. Through each of these stories runs the common thread of lives broken and haunted by the ethnic hatred and senseless killing that marked the conflict in Bosnia and Croatia. Brkic, who worked for the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal and as a forensic archaeologist in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is a gifted writer, able to place readers inside the lives of her characters. In the process, she adds a human dimension to a war that is all too often lost. FSG



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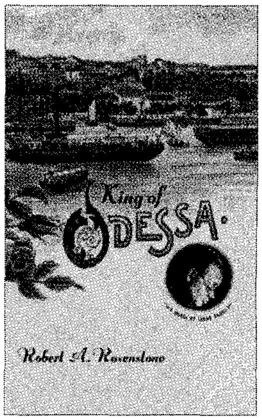
The Laws of Evening – *Mary Yukari Waters*

Mary Yukari Waters' graceful stories are stamped with the mark of an undeniable talent, filled with tales of Japanese women whose lives have been altered by the consequences of war. Tracing their struggles as they cope with the tragic loss of husbands, fathers, and children, Waters also illuminates the more subtle losses, such as the demise of traditional Japanese culture, quickly fading in the light of Western influences. Half-Japanese and half-Irish-American, Waters lived in Japan until she was 9, and her writing gives voice to characters caught between the world of their memories and the ever-encroaching modernity. Captured in her prose are women keening over the loss of tea ceremonies, flower arranging, and the correct degrees of bowing; women for whom "forks and knives [glisten] among [the] English china with the malevolence of surgical instruments." A compassionate observer of the worlds her characters straddle, Waters imbues their lives with a universal sense of humanity."There is no doubt that [they] will pass through this period and on into whatever lies beyond it, but at a gradually slowing pace; a part of [them]...will lag behind in the honeyed light of prewar years." Crafted with delicacy and attention to detail, Waters' stories are deceptively concise and poetic. At times, they read like 21st-century versions of ancient myths. SCRIBNER

King of Odessa – *Robert A. Rosenstone*

As with *The Hours* and Kate Moses' *Wintering*, talented writers have had a field day of late interpreting the unknown moments in the lives of important writers. In Rosenstone's imaginative first novel, he takes on influential Soviet writer Isaac Babel, whose literary reputation and work was lost to history during the dark days of the Soviet regime. *King of Odessa* is an artfully styled, fictional retelling of Babel's final trip to his hometown before he suffered the same fate of many artists and disfavored party members: He was arrested by the secret police and executed as a spy. Little is known of Babel's last visit to Odessa save for his correspondence with family members. In these letters, Babel concerns himself only with matters that would not draw the interest of government censors. In Rosenstone's version, Babel is involved in an elaborate plot to help a highly placed political dissident flee the country. The end result is a thoroughly diverting, cautionary tale – in which the real and the illusory entwine as Rosenstone shows how one man's desperation to maintain power inevitably destroys the very elements that might have made a new society great. An unusual introduction to the life and literature of Isaac Babel, *King of Odessa* also provides a marvelous sidebar for those already familiar with his work. NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS



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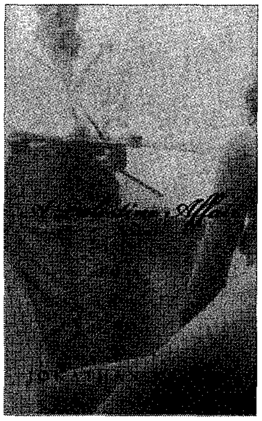
A Palestine Affair – *Jonathan Wilson*

Wilson's thrilling novel is a Hitchcockian page-turner, detailing affairs both romantic and political in the exotic atmosphere of British-ruled Palestine in the 1920s. At the close of World War I, Mark Bloomberg and his feisty American wife, Joyce, leave London for an art commission in Palestine, hoping the new surroundings will revive their ailing marriage. A Cubist landscape painter, Mark is surprisingly well paid for his images of Jerusalem. Joyce, still struggling to find her own vocation, becomes enthralled with the tenets of Zionism. Soon after they arrive, the Bloombergs witness the murder of a prominent political figure; the prime suspect is Saud, an Arab teenager believed to have been the victim's lover. Meanwhile, Joyce falls under the spell of the investigating officer, Robert Kirsch; and Mark relinquishes his hold on their marriage, accepting a commission in Petra. But Joyce begins socializing with ardent Zionists, and in her insatiable quest for adventure, agrees to deliver munitions to those running the movement; a choice that will seal not only her own fate but that of her estranged husband and of Kirsch. A dramatic, tension-filled novel about the ripple effect of the choices we make, *A Palestine Affair* is a tale both universal and specific, from a perceptive writer who deserves a larger audience. PANTHEON



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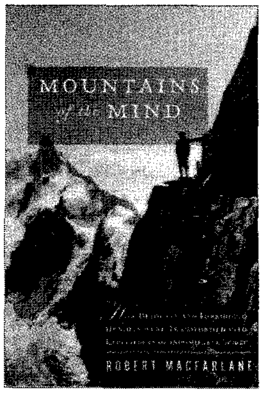
Mountains of the Mind – *Robert Macfarlane*

Anyone who believes that adventure stories are just for kids hasn't taken a look at the bestseller list recently. Americans have an unquenchable thirst for danger, if only to be experienced vicariously between the covers of a good book. In *Mountains of the Mind*, Robert Macfarlane adds a new twist to the adventure genre with this combination of a memoir depicting his own experience as a mountain climber, and an intriguing exploration of the shift in cultural perceptions of mountains over the centuries. Once frightening places of mystery, the rocky crags have become sources of inspiration that ignite imaginations and compel adventurers of every ilk to risk life and limb in order to scale their heights. Macfarlane traces the roots of our love affair with mountains, and includes advancements in geology and our growing understanding of how the Earth was formed. He also offers an insightful reflection on what drives climbers to pursue their goals so obsessively despite the potentially tragic consequences. But while Macfarlane's research is extensive, he's careful not to let it overwhelm his story. He rhapsodizes so eloquently about the beauty and peace he has experienced while climbing that it's clear this talented writer understands the seductive power of his subject all too well. PANTHEON



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"An anagram for 'idiot'?"

Manley giggled and shook his head. "It's also 'tio,' which is 'uncle' in Spanish, and 'di,' which means 'two.' U.N.C.L.E. Two. Get it?"

"Di-tio."

"Except it's scrambled. DIOTI sounds better."

"God, that is stupid."

He nodded eagerly, delightedly. "I know! It's so stupid! Isn't it great?"

Nine of us were piling out of two cars very late on the last Saturday of the school year, wearing dark clothes and dark stocking caps, carrying coils of rope, and zipping up knapsacks that contained hammers, wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, and customized floor plans of the high school—in my knapsack there was also Easter candy and green plastic Easter hay, five rhymed quatrains that I'd typed on slips of bond paper, and other special equipment—when a police car rounded the corner of Selma Avenue and turned on its searchlight.

My instinct in police situations, honed by years of shooting off fireworks in a community where they were banned, was to take off running into the dark of the nearest lawn. Half of DIOTI came loping and scattering after me. It was a long time since I'd run through dark lawns uninvited. There was dew on everything, and you could encounter a dog, you could hook your foot in a croquet wicket. I stopped and hid in a clump of rhododendrons in which Schroer, the "Monty Python" disciple, was also hiding.

"Franzen? Is that you? You're making an incredible amount of noise."

As my breathing moderated, I could hear the breathing of the squad car's engine in the distance, the murmur of discussion. Then, more distinctly, a shouted whisper: "Ally-ally-out-'n'-free! Ally-ally-out-'n'-free!" The voice belonged to Holyoke, one of our new recruits, and at first I didn't understand what he was saying. The equivalent call on my own street was Ally-ally-in-come-free.

"The story," Holyoke whispered as we returned to the patrol car, "is we're tying a door shut. Gerri Chopin's front door. We're going to the Chopins' house to tie her door shut. We're using the ropes to tie the door. And the tools are for taking off the hinges."

"Michael, that doesn't make any—"

"Why take off the hinges if we're tying—"

"Hello!"

"Hello, officer!"

The patrolman was standing in his headlight beams, examining knapsacks. "What are you doing with such a big rope?" he said.

"That's not a big rope," Peppel said. "That's several small ropes tied together."

There was a brief silence.

The officer asked us if we knew that it was after one o'clock.

"Yes, we do know that," Manley said, stepping forward and squaring his shoulders. He had a forthright manner whose ironic hollowness no adult, only peers, seemed able to detect. Teachers and mothers found Manley irresistible. Certainly, in spite of his shoulder-length hair, my own mother did.

"So what are you doing out so late?"

Manley hung his head and confessed that we'd intended to tie the Chopins' screen door shut. His tone suggested that he could see now, as he couldn't five minutes ago, what a childish and negative idea this was. Standing behind him, three or four of us pointed at the Chopins' house. That's the Chopins' house right there, we said.

The officer looked at the door. We would seem to have been a rather large crew, with a lot of ropes and tools, for the task of tying one screen door shut, and we were less than a hundred yards from the high school in prime pranking season. But it was 1976 and we were white and not drunk. "Go home to bed," he said.

The squad car followed Kortenhof's station wagon back to his house, where, in his bedroom, we decided not to make a second attempt that night; the situation was too dangerous now. If we waited until Tuesday, we could get a better cover story in place. We could say, I said, that we were observing an unusual stellar occultation by the planet Mars, and that we needed tools to assemble a telescope. I insisted that everyone memorize the bogus name of the bogus star: NGC 6346.

Luckily, the sky was clear on Tuesday night. Davis escaped his house by jumping out a window. Schroer spent the night at Peppel's and helped him push the family car out of earshot before starting it. Manley, as usual, simply got into his father's Opel and drove it to my

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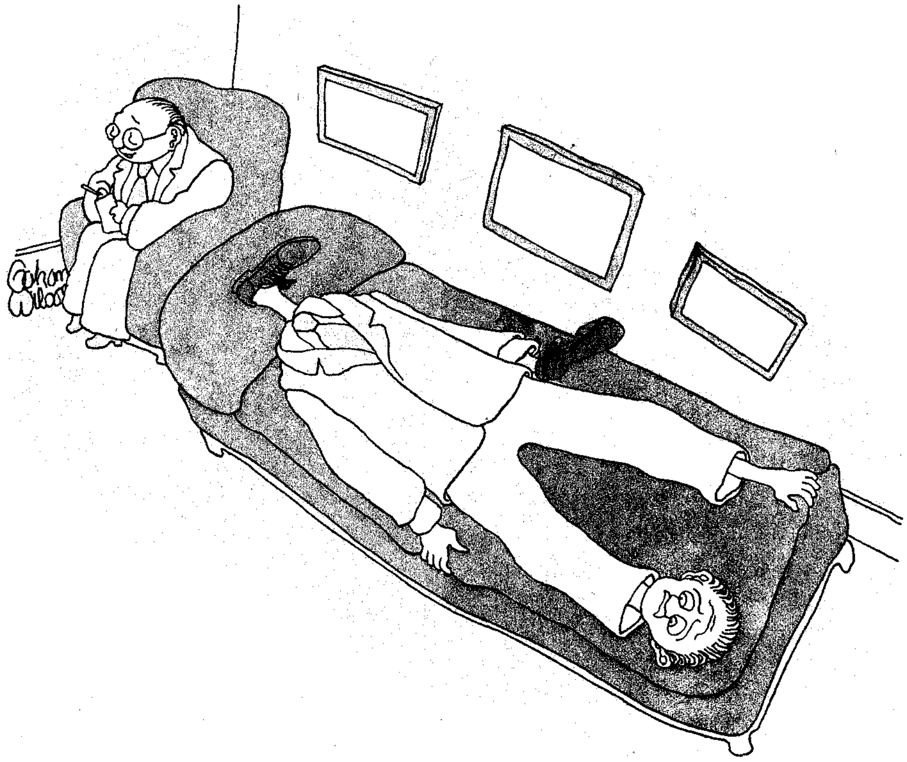

"We'll soon have you sorted out, Mr. Fenton."

house, where I'd climbed from my bedroom window and retrieved pieces of my hitherto useless telescope from the bushes where I'd hidden them.

"We're going to watch Mars occult NGC 6346," Manley recited.

A long-standing misery of appearances was the shallowness of my supposed love of science. I liked reading about science, but my practice of it was strictly magical. I longed to get my hands on a bit of pure selenium or rubidium, because who else had pure selenium or rubidium in their home? But if a chemical wasn't rare, colorful, flammable, or explosively reactive, there was no point in stealing it from school. My father, my rational ally, who by his own testimony had married my mother because "she was a good writer and I thought a good writer could do anything," and who'd chafed against her romantic nature ever since, encouraged me to be a scientist and discouraged me from fancy writing. One Christmas, as a present, he built me a serious lab bench, and for a while I enjoyed imagining myself keeping a more rigorous notebook. My first and last experiment was to isolate "pure nylon" by melting a scrap of panty hose in a crucible. Turning to astronomy, I again was happy as long as I was reading books, but these books reprinted pages from amateur stargazing logs whose orderly example I couldn't follow even for one minute. I just wanted to look at pretty things.

Riding with Manley through the ghostly streets of Webster Groves, I was moved for the same reason that snow had moved me as a child, for its transformative enchantment of ordinary surfaces. The long rows of dark houses, their windows dimly reflecting the street lights, were as still as armored knights asleep under a spell. It was just as Tolkien had promised: there really was another world. The road, devoid of cars and fading into distant haze, really did go ever on and on. Unusual things could happen when nobody was looking.

On the roof of the high school, Manley and Davis gathered ropes to rappel down exterior walls while Kortenhof and Schroer set off for the gym, intending to enter through a high window and climb down on one of the folded-up trampolines. The rest of DIOTI went in through a trapdoor, past a crawl space, and out through a biology-department storage room.

Our floor plans showed the location of the thirty-odd bells that we'd identified while canvassing the school. Most of the bells were the size of half-coconuts and were mounted in hallways. During a lunch hour, we'd given a boost to Kortenhof, who had unscrewed the dish from one of these bells and silenced it by removing the clapper—a pencil-thick cylinder of graphite-blackened metal—from its electromagnetic housing. Two teams of two now headed off to disable the other bells like this and collect the clappers.

I had my slips of paper and worked alone. In a second-floor hallway, at knee level between two lockers, was an intriguing little hole with a hinged metal cap. The hole led back into obscure scholastic recesses. Manley and I had often passed idle minutes speaking into it and listening for answers.

In my laboratory at home, I'd rolled one of my slips of paper up tightly, sealed it inside a segment of glass tubing with a Bunsen flame, and tied and taped a piece of string around the tube. This ampule I now lowered through the little rabbit hole until it dropped out of sight. Then I tied the string to the hinge and shut the metal cap. On the slip of paper was a quatrain of doggerel:

The base of a venetian blind
Contains another clue.
Look in the conference room that's off
The library. (What's new?)

In the venetian blind was other doggerel, which I'd planted during school hours:

There is a clue behind the plate
That's on the western side
Of those large wooden fire doors
Near room three sixty-five.

I went now and unscrewed the push-plate from the fire door and taped another slip to the wood underneath:

And last, another bookish clue
Before the glorious find.
The Little Book of Bells' the one;
Its code is seven eight nine.

There were further quatrains hidden on an emergency-lighting fixture, rolled up inside a projection screen, and stuck in a library book called "Your School Clubs." Some of the quatrains could

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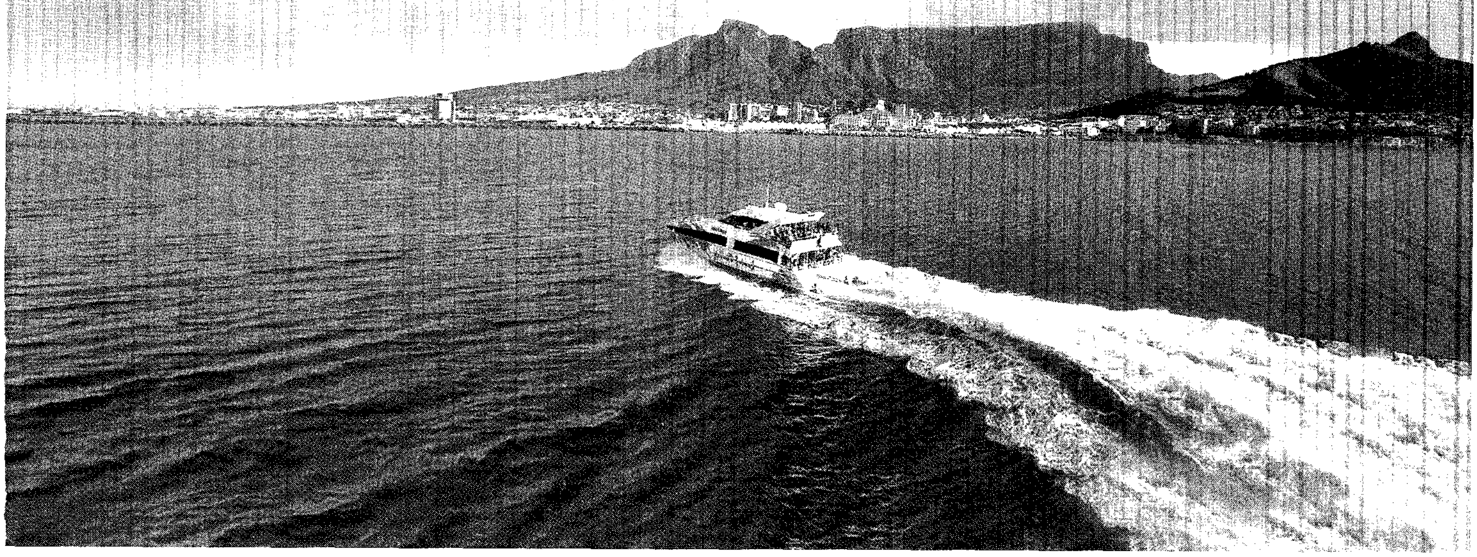

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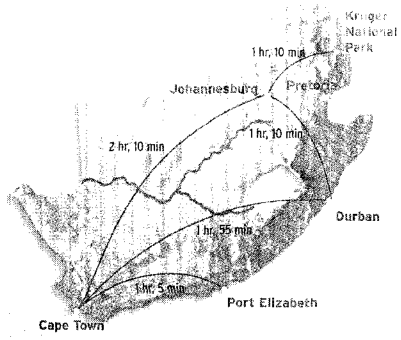

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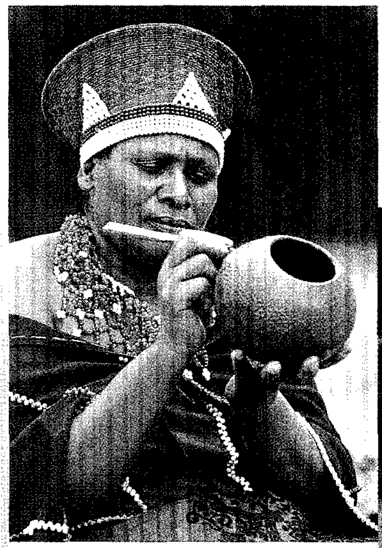

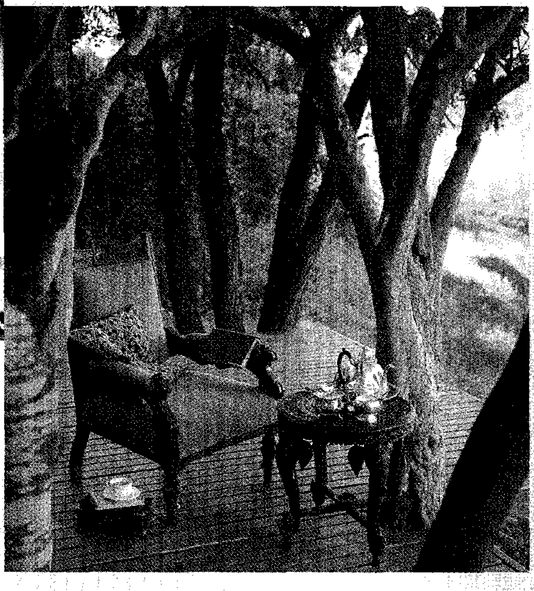

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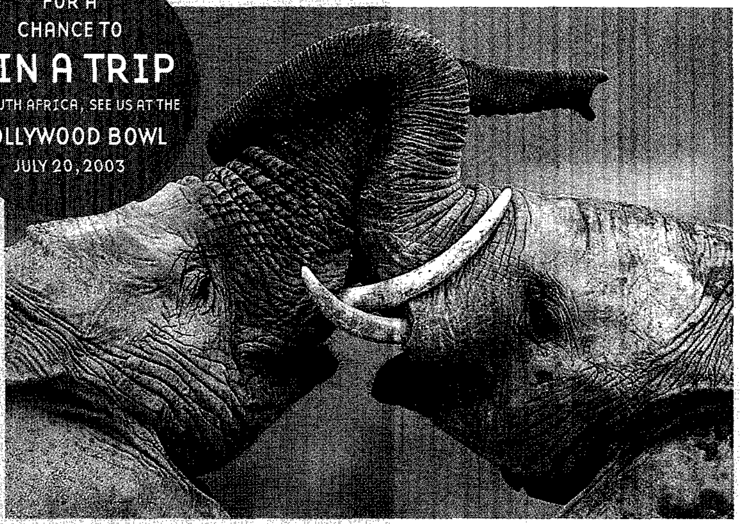

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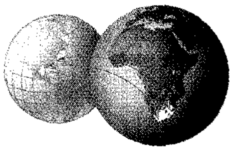

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CALL 1-800-782-9772 OR VISIT WWW.SOUTHAFRICANSTORIES.COM have used a rewrite, but nobody thought they were a piece of shit. My idea was to enchant the school for Mr. Knight, to render the building momentarily strange and full of possibility, as a gift to him; and I was in the midst of discovering that writing was a way to do this.

During the previous two months, students from the five high-school physics classes had written and produced a farce about Isaac Newton, "The Fig Connection." I had co-chaired the writing committee with a pretty senior girl, Siebert, toward whom I'd quickly developed strong feelings of stagnation. Siebert was a tomboy who wore bib overalls and knew how to go camping, but she was also an artist who drew and wrote effortlessly and had charcoal stains and acrylic smudges on her hands, and she was also a fetching Catholic girly-girl who every so often let her hair down and wore high-waisted skirts. I wanted all of her and resented other boys for wanting any part of her. Our play was so warmly received that one of the English teachers suggested that Siebert and I try to publish it. As everything had gone wrong for me in junior high, suddenly everything was going right.

Toward three o'clock, DIOTI reconvened on the roof with booty: twenty-five clappers and five metal dishes, the latter daringly unbolted from the bigger bells that were mounted on high walls. We tied the clappers together with pink ribbon, filled the largest dish with plastic hay and Easter candy, nestled the clappers and the smaller dishes in the hay, and stashed the whole thing in the crawl space. Returning home then, Peppel and Schroer had the worst of it, pushing Peppel's car back up a hill and into his driveway. I crept into my house less cautiously than usual. I hardly cared if I was Caught; for once, I had something they couldn't take away from me.

And to go back to school four hours later and see the place so peopled after seeing it so empty: here was a foretaste of seeing clothed in the daylight the first person you'd spent a night with naked.

And the silence then, at eight-fifteen, when the bells should have rung but didn't: this quiet transformation of the ordinary, this sound of one hand clapping, this beautiful absence, was like the poetry I wanted to learn to write.

At the end of first period, a teacher's voice came over the classroom speakers to announce that the bells were out of order. Later in the morning, the teacher began to announce not only the time but also, oddly, the temperature. Summer heat poured through the open windows, and without the usual prison-yard clanging the crowds in hallways seemed de-regimented, the boundaries of the hours blurred.

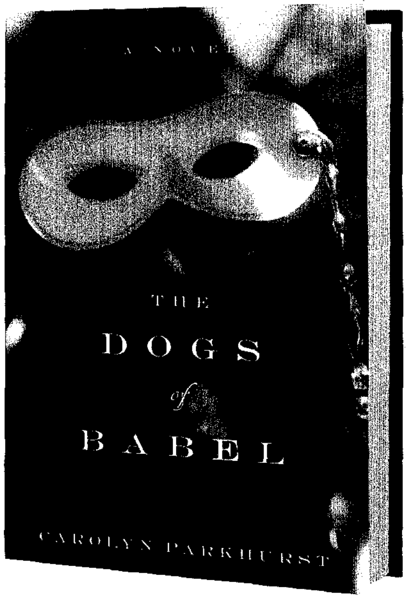
Manley at lunchtime brought happy news: the reason Mr. Knight wasn't making the announcements himself was that he was following the clues. Manley had spied him on the second floor, peering down into the rabbit hole. Despite the familiar tone we took with him, few members of DIOTI, certainly not I, had ever exchanged two words with Mr. Knight. He was the ideal, distant, benign, ridiculous Authority, and until now the notion that he might come out to play with us had been purely hypothetical.

The only shadow on the day was that a Device of mine again failed to work. Davis called me after school to report that Mr. Knight had lost the glass ampule down the rabbit hole. A canny English teacher, the same one who thought our play should be published, had promised Davis anonymity in exchange for the lost clue. I recited it over the phone, and the next morning the bells were working again. Kortenhof, who had had two hundred DIOTI bumper stickers printed up, went outside with Schroer in broad daylight and applied them to every rear bumper in the faculty parking lot.

That summer, my cousin Gail, my aunt and uncle's only child, was killed at the wheel of her car in West Virginia. My mother's mother was dying of liver disease in Minneapolis, and I became morbidly aware that there were fifty thousand nuclear warheads on the planet, several dozen of them targeting St. Louis. My wet dreams felt apocalyptic, like a ripping of vital organs. One night I was awakened by a violent clap of thunder and was convinced that the world was over.

It was the sweetest summer of my life. "One continuous round of pleasure," my father kept saying. I fell under the spell of Robert Pirsig and Wallace Stevens and began to write poetry. During the day, Siebert and I shot and edited a Super-8 costume drama with Davis

"A strange, beautiful and very moving novel



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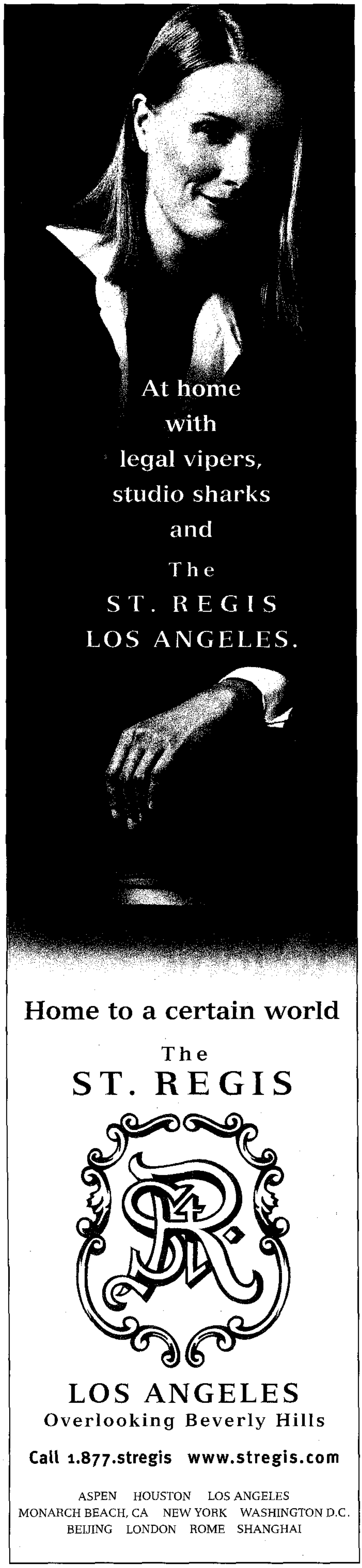

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and Lunte, and at night we painted a Rousseauian jungle mural on a wall at the high school. We were still just friends, but every evening that I spent with her was an evening that she didn't spend with other boys. On her birthday, in July, as she was leaving her house, three of us jumped her from behind, blindfolded her, tied her wrists, and put her in the back of Lunte's car. We had a surprise party waiting on a riverbank beneath an interstate overpass, and to Siebert's increasingly plaintive questions—"Jon? Chris? Guys? Is that you?"—we said nothing until Lunte did forty-three in a thirty zone. The cop who pulled us over made us unblind her. When he asked her if she knew us, you could see her considering her options before she said yes.

In August, Siebert went away to college, which allowed me to idealize her from a distance, communicate mainly in writing, put energy into new theatrical projects, and casually date someone else. Late in the fall, a publisher bought "The Fig Connection" for a hundred dollars, and I told my parents that I was going to be a writer. They weren't happy to hear it.

DIOTI's first prank of the new year was to batik a queen-size bedsheet and unfurl it over the school's main entrance on the morning that an accrediting committee from the North Central Association arrived to inspect the school. I built a Device involving two sheet-metal levers, a pulley, and a rope that ran across the roof and dangled by a third-floor courtyard window. When we pulled the rope on Monday morning, nothing happened. Davis had to go outside, climb to the roof in plain view, and unfurl the banner by hand. It said "DIOTI WELCOMES YOU, NCA."

Through the winter, subgroups of DIOTI staged smaller side-pranks. I had a taste for scenes involving costumes and toy guns. Davis and Manley kept climbing buildings, proceeding on a typical Saturday night from the gargoyled bell tower of Eden Seminary to the roofs of Washington University and finally to the kitchen of the Presbyterian church, where freshly baked Sunday cookies were available to intruders.

For the main spring prank, we chose as a victim one of my favorite teachers, Ms. Wojak, because her room was in the middle of the second floor and had a very high ceiling, and because she was rumored to have disparaged DIOTI. Our membership was back up to nine, including a girl named Swift, and it took us four hours on a Wednesday night to empty thirty rooms of their desks, herd the desks down stairs and through hallways, and pack them, floor to ceiling, into Ms. Wojak's room. There was good wee-hour bonhomie in turning a corner in a lonely hallway and seeing two or three colleagues assiduously portaging furniture. Some of the rooms had transoms that Manley or Davis could climb through. To get into the others, we took the hinges off the door of the main office and made use of the keys that teachers habitually left in their mail slots. Since I was fifty as well as seventeen, I'd insisted that we bring masking tape and markers and label the desks with their room numbers before moving them, to simplify the job of putting them back. Even so, I was sorry when I saw what a violent snarl we'd made of Ms. Wojak's room. I thought she might feel singled out for persecution, and so I wrote the words "CENTRALLY LOCATED" on her blackboard. It was the only writing I did for DIOTI that spring. I didn't care about Mr. Knight anymore; the work was all that mattered.

During our graduation ceremonies, at the football field, the superintendent of schools told the story of the desks and cited their masking-tape labels as evidence of "a new spirit of responsibility" among young people today. DIOTI had secreted a farewell banner, batiked in school colors, in the base of the football scoreboard, but the Device I'd built to release it hadn't worked well in trials the night before, and, in any case, vigilant administrators had snipped the release line before Holyoke, disguised in a fisherman's outfit and dark glasses, arrived to pull it. After the ceremony, I wanted to tell my parents that it was now official: I was the author of a new spirit of responsibility among young people today. But of course I couldn't, and didn't.

That summer, I expected to start drinking and having sex. Siebert had returned from college by herself (her family had moved to Texas), and we had already done some heavy stagnating on her grandmother's living-room sofa. Now Lunte and his family were about to embark on a two-month camping trip, leaving Siebert to house-sit for them. She would be in the house by herself, every night, for two months.

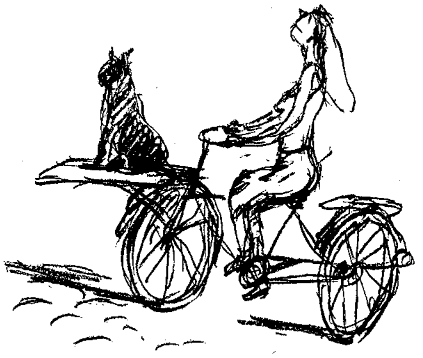
She and I both took jobs downtown, and on our first Friday she failed to show up for a lunch date with me. I spent the afternoon wondering whether, as with M—, I might be coming on too strong. But that evening, while I was eating dinner with my parents, Davis came to our house and delivered the news: Siebert was in St. Joseph's Hospital with a broken back. She'd asked Davis to take her to the top of the Eden Seminary bell tower the night before, and she'd fallen from a thirty-foot downspout.

The news was sickening. Even as I tried to absorb it, though, my immediate concern was that my parents were getting it directly, before I could tailor it. I felt as if I and all my friends had been Caught in a new, large, and irrevocable way. My mother, as she listened to Davis, was wearing her darkest scowl. She'd always preferred the well-spoken Manley to the more lumpy Davis, and she'd never had much use for Siebert, either. Her disapproval now was radiant and total. My father, who liked Siebert, was upset nearly to the point of tears. "I don't understand what you were doing on the roof," he said.

"Yeah, well, so anyway," Davis said miserably, "so she wasn't on the roof yet. I was on the roof trying to reach down and, you know, help her."

"But, Chris, my God," my father cried. "*Why were the two of you climbing on the roof at Eden Seminary?*"

Davis looked a little pissed off. He'd done the right thing by giving me the news in person, and now, as a reward, my parents were beating him up. "Yeah, well, so anyway," he said, "she like called me last night and she wanted me to take her up to the top of the tower. I wanted to use rope, but she's a really good climber. She didn't want the rope."



"There's a nice view from the tower," I explained. "You can see all around."

My mother turned to me severely. "Have you been up there?"

"No," I said, which was accidentally the truth.

"I don't understand this at all," my father said.

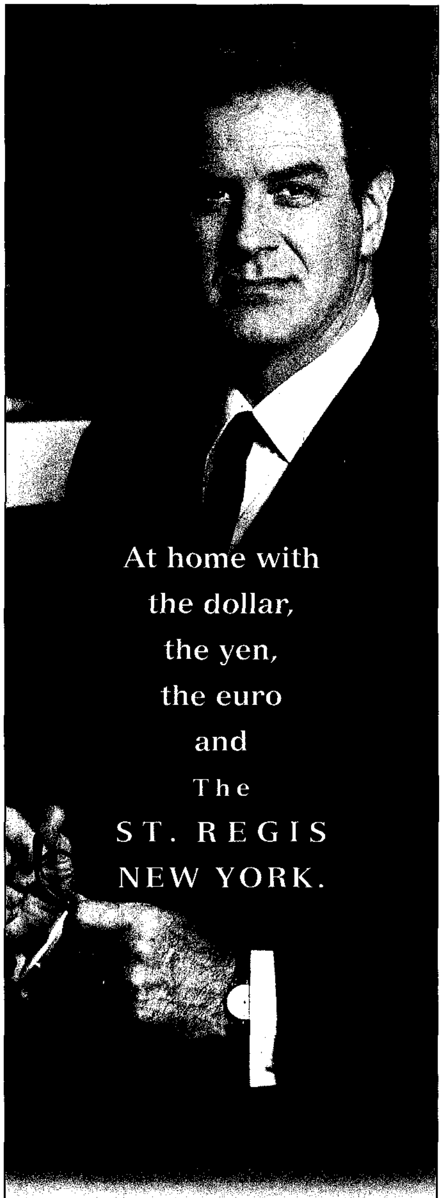
In Davis's Pinto, as the two of us drove to Eden, he said that he'd gone up the downspout ahead of Siebert. The downspout was solid and well anchored to the wall, and Siebert had followed him easily until she reached the gutter. If she'd just extended her hand, Davis said, he could have reached down from the roof and pulled her up. But she seemed to panic, and before he could help her the focus went out of her eyes, her hands flew back behind her head, and she went straight down, twenty-five feet, landing flat on her back on the seminary lawn. The thud, Davis said, was horrible. Without thinking, without even lowering himself off the gutter, he jumped down thirty feet and broke his fall with the roll he'd practiced after lesser jumps. Siebert was moaning. He ran and banged on the nearest lighted windows and shouted for an ambulance.

The grass at the base of the downspout was not as trampled as I'd expected. Davis pointed to the spot where the E.M.T.s had put Siebert on a rigid pallet. I forced myself to look up at the gutter. The evening air at Eden, incoherently, was mild and delicious. There was twilight birdsong in the freshly foliated oak trees, Protestant lights coming on in Gothic windows.

"You jumped down from there?" I said.

"Yeah, it was really dumb."

Siebert, it turned out, had been fortunate in landing flat. Two of her vertebrae were fractured, but her nerves were intact. She was in the hospital for six weeks, and I went to see her every evening, sometimes with Davis, more often alone. A guitarist friend and I wrote inspirational songs and sang them for her during thunderstorms. It was dark all summer. I lay on the Luntes' pool table with rum, Lowenbrau, Seagram's, and blackberry wine in my stomach and



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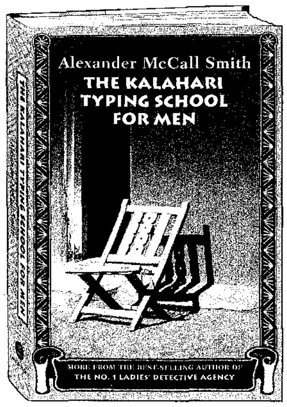
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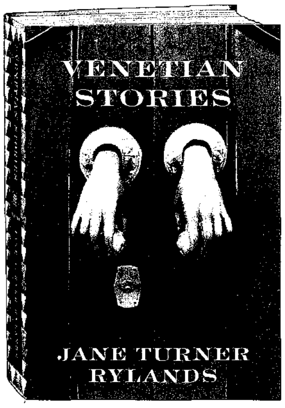

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watched the ceiling spin. I didn't hate myself, but I hated adolescence, hated the very word. In August, after Siebert's parents had taken her home to Texas with a cumbersome back brace and a lot of painkillers, I went on a date with a different girl and had, according to my journal, an excellent time making out.

Adolescence is best enjoyed without self-consciousness, but self-consciousness, unfortunately, is its leading symptom. Even when something important happens to you, even when your heart's getting crushed or exalted, even when you're absorbed in building the foundations of a personality, there come these moments when you're aware that what's happening is not the real story. Unless you actually die, the real story is still ahead of you. This alone, this cruel mixture of consciousness and irrelevance, this built-in hollowness, is enough to account for how pissed off you are. You're miserable and ashamed if you don't believe your adolescent troubles matter, but you're stupid if you do. This was the double bind from which our playing with Mr. Knight, our taking something so very useless so very seriously, had given us a fifteen-month reprieve.

But when does the real story start? At forty-three, I feel grateful almost daily to be the adult I wished I could be when I was seventeen. I work on my arm strength at the gym; I've become pretty good with tools. At the same time, almost daily, I lose battles with the seventeen-year-old who's still inside me. I eat half a box of Oreos for lunch, I binge on TV, I make sweeping moral judgments, I run around town in torn jeans, I drink Martinis on a Tuesday night, I stare at beer-commercial cleavage, I define as uncool any group to which I can't belong, I sneak cigarettes on the roof, I feel the urge to key Range Rovers and slash their tires; I pretend I'm never going to die.

The double bind, the problem of consciousness mixed with nothingness, never goes away. You never stop waiting for the real story to start, because the only real story, in the end, is that you die. Along the way, however, Mr. Knight keeps reappearing: Mr. Knight as God, Mr. Knight as history, Mr. Knight as government or fate or nature. And the game of art, which begins as a bid for Mr. Knight's attention, eventually invites you to pursue it for its own sake, with a seriousness that redeems and is redeemed by its fundamental uselessness.

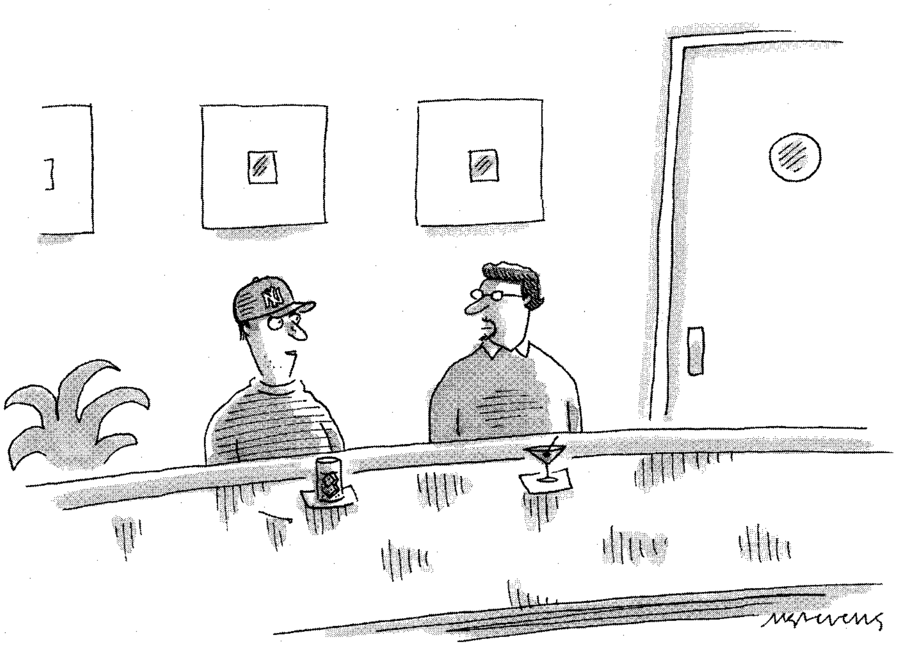
For an inexperienced Midwesterner in the fast-living East, college turned out to be a reprise of junior high. I managed to befriend a few fellow-lonely-hearts, but the only pranks I was involved in were openly sadistic—pelting a popular girl with cubes of Jell-O, hauling an eight-foot length of rail into the dorm room of a bearded international-studies major. Manley and Davis sounded no happier at their respective schools; they were smoking a lot of pot. Lunte had moved to Moscow, Idaho. Holyoke, still with DIOTI, organized a final prank involving a classroom waist-deep in crumpled newspaper.

Siebert came back to St. Louis the next summer, walking without pain, wearing clothes in the style of Annie Hall, and working with me on a farce about a police inspector in colonial India. My feelings toward her were an adolescent stew of love-and-reconsider, of commit-and-keep-your-options-open. We spent our last night of the summer in the house of a friend whose parents were away. In the morning, Manley and Davis came to the door with a white cane, Davis's dimwitted spaniel, Goldie, and a pair of swimming goggles that they'd dipped in black paint. It was my birthday, and they invited me to put the goggles on. Thus blinded, I was given the cane and Goldie's leash. I amused my friends by trying to eat pancakes, blind, at a pancake house. Siebert went home then, and I sat in the back seat of the car while Goldie was dropped off and the three of us travelled on arterials in a baking August sun.

I guessed that we were going to the Arch, on the riverfront, and we were. I gamely went tap-tapping through the Arch's underground lobby, my sense of hearing growing sharper by the minute. Davis bought tickets to the top of the Arch while Manley incited me to touch a Remington bronze, a rearing horse. Behind us a man spoke sharply: "Please don't touch the— Oh. Oh. I'm sorry."

I took my hands away.

"No, no, please, go ahead. It's an original Remington, but please touch it."



"Actually, I'm not a New York Yankees fan.
I'm a New York Yankees cap fan."

• •

I put my hands back on the bronze. Manley, the little jerk, went off to giggle someplace with Davis. The park ranger's hands led mine. "Feel the muscles in the horse's chest," he urged.

I was wearing mutilated swimming goggles. My cane was a quarter-inch dowel rod with one coat of white paint. I turned to leave.

"Wait," the ranger said. "There are some really neat things I want to show you."

"Um."

He took my arm and led me deeper into the Museum of Westward Expansion. His voice grew even gentler. "How long have you been—without your sight?"

"Not long," I said.

"Feel this tepee." He directed my hand. "These are buffalo skins with the hair scraped off. Here, I'll take your cane."

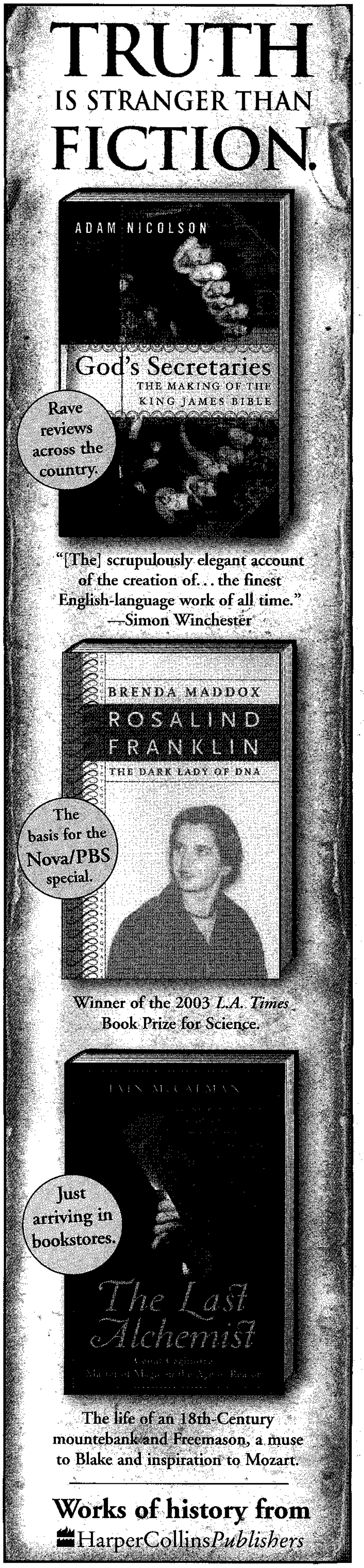
We went inside the tepee, and for a daylong five minutes I dutifully stroked furs, fingered utensils, smelled woven baskets. I hadn't slept at all the night before, and the crime of deceiving the ranger felt more grievous with each passing minute. When I escaped from the tepee and thanked him, I was dripping with sweat.

At the top of the Arch, I was finally unblinded and saw: haze, glare, coal barges, Busch Stadium, a diarrheic river. Manley shrugged and looked at the metal floor. "We were hoping you'd be able to see more up here," he said.

It often happened on my birthday that the first fall cold front of summer came blowing through. The next afternoon, when my parents and I drove east to a wedding in Fort Wayne, the sky was scrubbed clean. Giant Illinois cornfields, nearly ripe, rippled in the golden light from behind us. You could taste, in air fresh from crossing Lake Superior, almost everything there was to know about life around here. And how devoid of interiors the farmhouses looked in light so perfect! How impatient to be harvested the cornfields seemed in their wind-driven tossing! And how platonically green the official signs for Effingham! (Its unofficial name, I surmised, was Fuckingham.) The season had changed overnight, and I was reading better books and trying to write every day, starting over from scratch now, by myself.

My father was exceeding the speed limit by an unvarying four miles per hour. My mother spoke from the back seat. "What did you and Chris and Ben do yesterday?"

"Nothing," I said. "We had breakfast." ♦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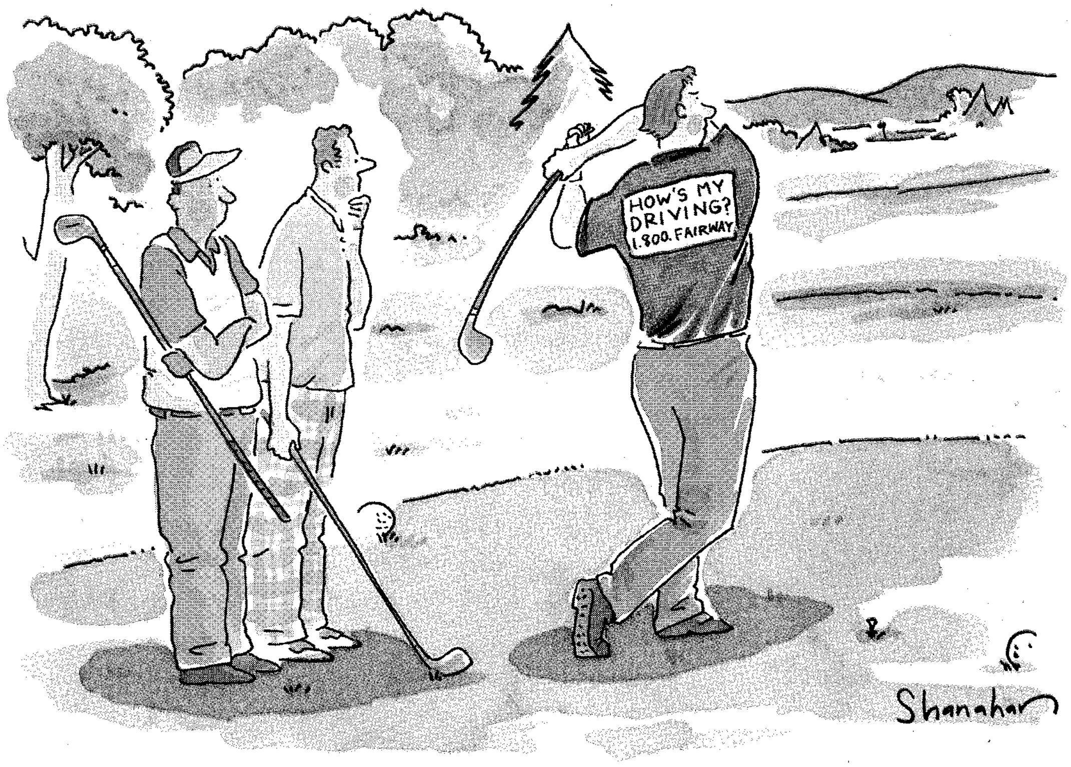


TEE!HEE

A HUMAN HISTORY OF THE TYRANNY OF GOLF

Ask about the origins of golf and the average person will quickly reply: "Medieval Scotland is considered the birthplace of the sport." Early golfers there utilized pastures as fairways and employed tree branches to hit walnuts into holes. Sheep were frequently pressed into service as caddies and in 1457, King James II banned the game as detrimental to the feudal system since it caused the peasants to wrongly believe there was more to life than sheer misery. Apparently the ban was ineffectual because two years later Parliament passed a really serious ban, this time describing golf as "unnaturally lascivious as well as suggestive (though of what we have no idea)."

But recent archeological digs undertaken by radical sport historians have found that even though golf did indisputably begin in Scotland, it actually started somewhere else. Indeed, in the ancient world, the game's precursors were nearly ubiquitous, though they often went unnoticed as most people were too busy dying of plague, famine, or bad takeout food to read the sports pages. Also, there were no sports pages.

Sport historians believe that the ground-based-spheroid-impact phenomenon first sprung up in grassy plains because the arc of a swinging golf club was so similar to that of a scythe. It is speculated that in ancient Scythia a farmer reaping his crops may have accidentally struck a pebble and sent it flying into the air, touching down in a rodent burrow that had, by some bizarre coincidence, a pennant-bearing pole sticking out of it. Challenged to defend this hypothesis on a TV game show, a leading golfologist recently pointed out with devastating logic: "You got a better theory?"

In summer, a golf-like game is known to have flourished in the fertile delta of the Tigris and Euphrates. But since this was well before the Iron Age, only woods were employed, which made for a certain lack of precision in approach shots and putting.

Though there is dispute over the exact translation, most experts interpret hieroglyphics on the gold sarcophagus of Egyptian pharaoh Cheops XVIII to read: "The pro tells

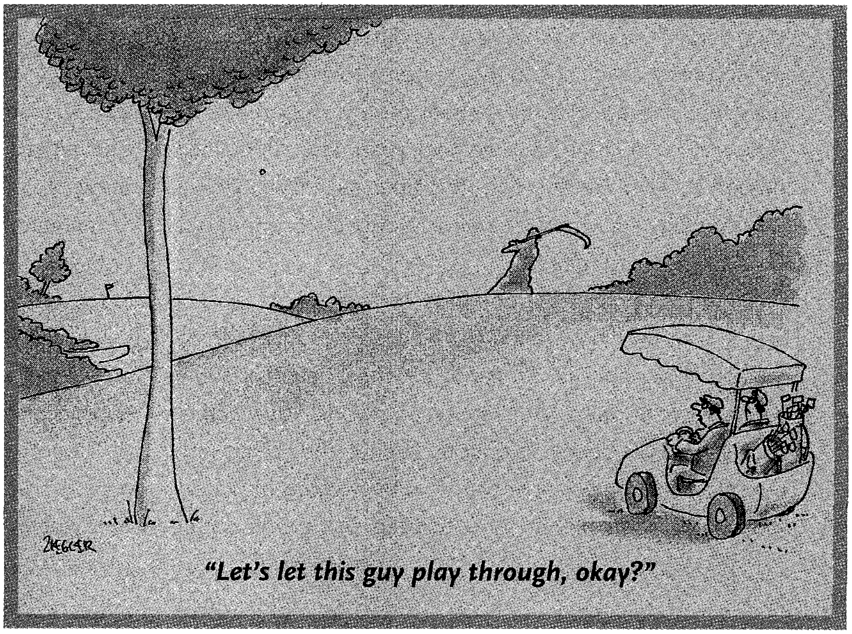
By Lewis Grossberger

me I'm not cocking my right wrist early enough, which is throwing off my backswing. I shall take him along to the afterlife with me so that I may keep working on the problem." His faithful if none too astute son, Cheops XVIII Jr., tried to bump up the game into a religion but found his subjects reluctant to regard little white dimpled balls as omnipotent deities after spending most of their lives worshipping the sun. (It was not until modern times that Jr.'s idea bore fruit.)

In Greece, golfing styles varied in each city-state. The Spartans, for instance, insisted on playing in large, unwieldy groups called eighty-foursomes. If a slower group would not yield to another's demand to play through, war would be declared and siege engines brought onto the fairways, effectively ending the golf season. Athenians, more given to philosophical reflection, played a cerebral game in which weighty questions were discussed between holes. Eventually, they dispensed with the pretext of balls altogether, though they still carried clubs in case the Spartans showed up.

In their decadent era, the Romans considered golf a form of foreplay, which is why lusty shouts of "fore" were heard throughout the land. They also invented miniature golf, but this was primarily to appease Thracian midgets. After the fall of the Roman Empire, with barbarians running amok, golf went into decline. Most barbarians were too irritable to golf, preferring hands-on contact sports such as homicide. Some historians claim Attila the Hun relaxed with a little putting after a good rampage, though others believe he was actually "puttying." Even Genghis Khan, a rival for the title of Most Annoying Despot of All Time, liked to shoot a few rounds of golf now and then. Captured enemies were forced to lie on their backs with their mouths open, thus giving rise to the then-popular phrase "Anyone for a mouthful of golf?"

During the so-called Dark Ages, when Europe's fairways had reverted to muddy, litter-strewn driving ranges, golf enjoyed a Golden Age in the distant Islamic world. But the problem was that gold clubs and balls proved too expensive and easily dented, so the Golden Age lasted little more than a fortnight. Still, it was a glittering couple of weeks. Its highlight came when the Grand Mukhtar of Arabia broke two hundred on a course containing the world's



"Let's let this guy play through, okay?"

Golf is like a Dylan song; you don't have to understand it to enjoy it.

–Franz Lidz quoting PGA pro David Feherty

Without the golf course, Republicans would lose their strongest claim upon the cause of environmentalism.

–Mark Katz

Golf is like Catholicism: It has a bunch of arbitrary rules no one follows and is characterized by equal amounts of devotion, guilt, shame, and the firm belief that women will ruin everything if we allow them full membership.

–Kevin Guilfoile

God on golf: "For this I gave you an opposable thumb?"

–M.K.

I like golf. Golf is my chance to get somebody else's lawn looking as bad as mine.

–Marc Jaffe

Golf is basically like losing your keys. You spend hours searching for something that you know is around here somewhere.

–M.J.

Golf is the only game where the best players are sub-par.

–M. Sweeney Lawless

It's good to know there's always someone somewhere playing golf so I don't have to.

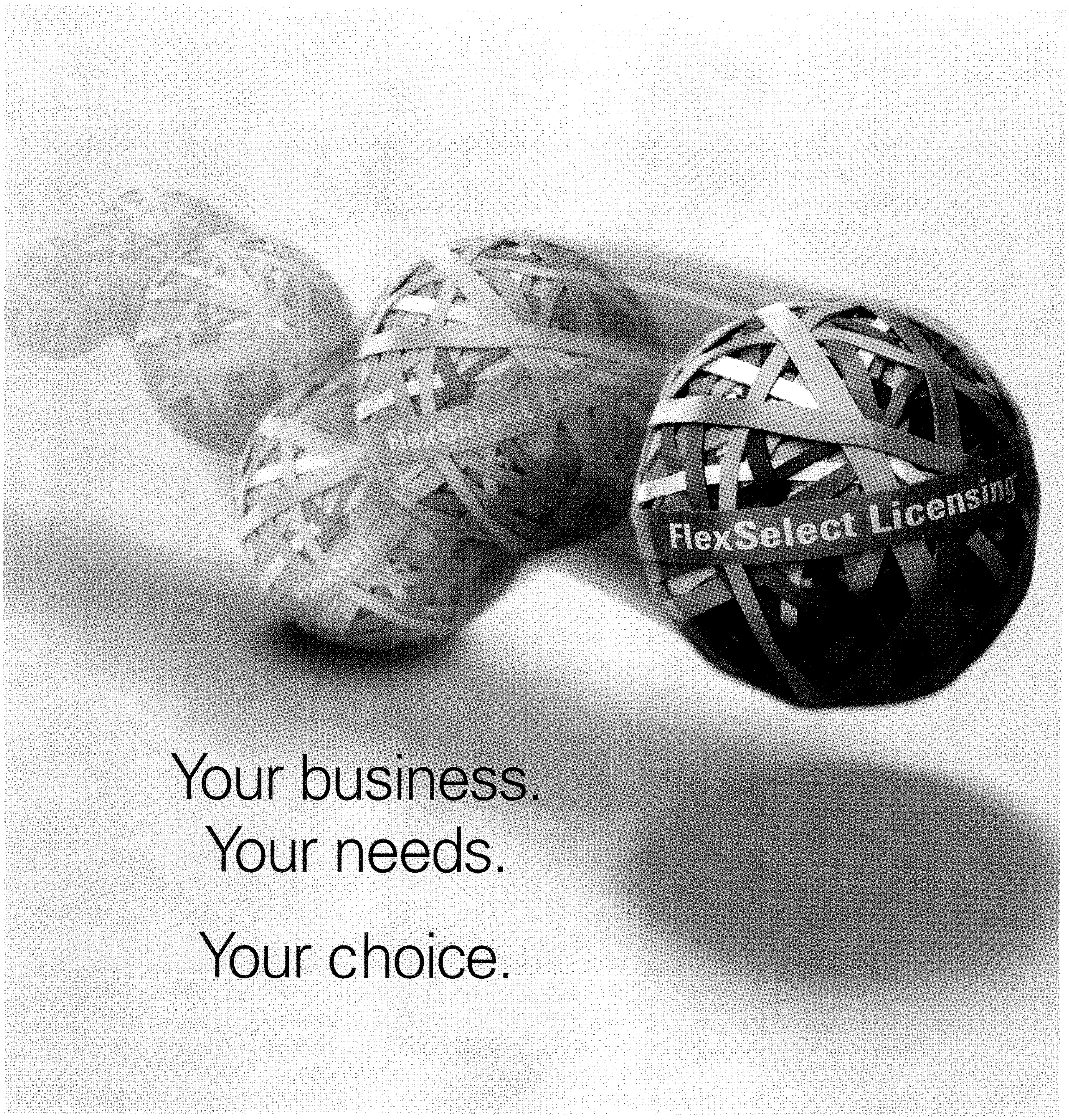
–Francis Heaney

The worst day on the golf course is better than the best day on the Titanic.

–Matt Neuman

The difference between golf and every other human endeavor is that it's impossible to play the piano four hours every Saturday for thirty-five years and never get any better at it.

–K.G.



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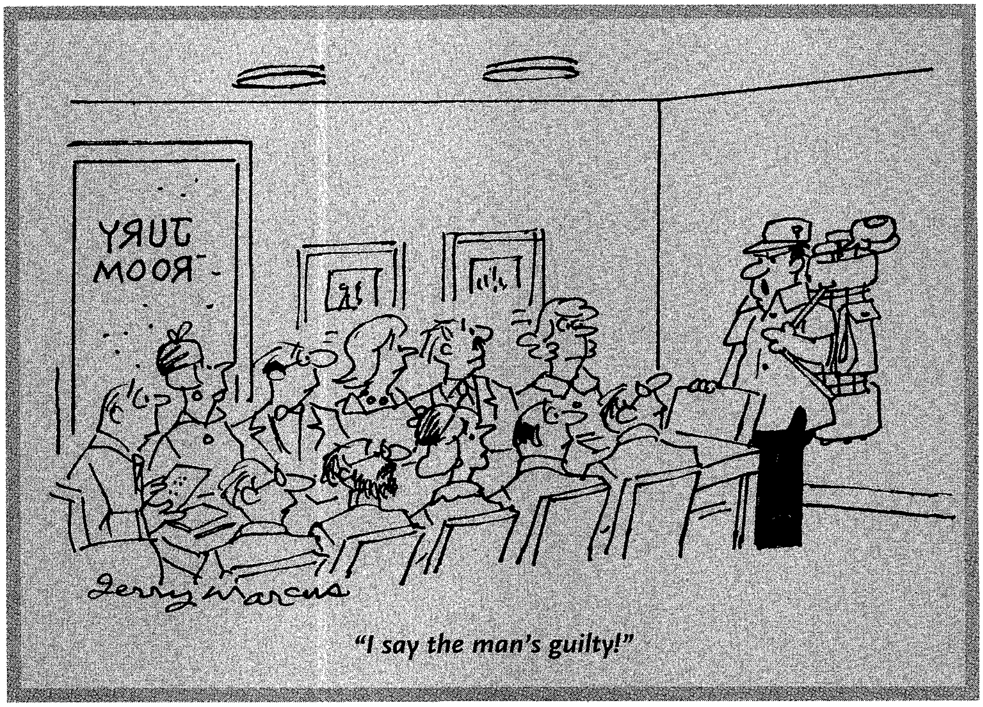
largest sand trap.

The modern era has brought vast change to every area of human endeavor, except golf, which remains essentially static from one eon to the next. Thomas Edison once invented an electric golf ball to enable night play. But the innovation didn't catch on because golfers lost too much loft on their drives due to the extension cord. Enthusiasts did however embrace the golf cart, (originally goat driven when invented in 1834). Yet even today most players still insist on climbing out of their vehicle before hitting the ball—despite the gross inefficiency of this practice.



"I say the man's guilty!"

Golfing argot has also resisted modernizing. Frantic efforts were made by early twentieth-century reformers to distinguish "golf club" (meaning golf bat) from "golf club" (meaning fancy-pants golf-playing venue) so the two would not be hopelessly confused. These efforts proved futile as both terms were already too deeply entrenched. Similarly, the request "Give me my sand wedge" still results in a player being handed a ham and Swiss with mayo instead of the desired implement.

AN UNIMPEACHABLE PASTIME

During the nineteenth century when morals were much stricter than today, politicians were so ashamed of their golfing habit that they kept it a secret. In fact, that is why the Secret Service was originally formed, to help chief executives suppress any rumors, lest the public grow alarmed. Despite its questionable reputation, golf's steady rise in popularity insured that nearly every U.S. president since Rutherford B. Hayes became a golfer. (Though it must be noted that some historians question whether Rutherford B. Hayes ever really existed).

- William McKinley, an inveterate practical joker, liked to surprise visitors to the Oval Office by opening his mouth and letting a dozen golf balls pop out onto his desk. He would then jubilantly exclaim, "On his best day, Grover Cleveland could only stuff eight!"
- Theodore Roosevelt found golfing so pedestrian, that he played the game on horseback.
- Despite his legendary corpulence, William Howard Taft was so addicted to golf he once canceled an invasion of Canada in order to get in eighteen holes before dark. He then fainted from exhaustion and had to take a three-day nap. Had he not done so, Canada would today be the fifty-first state.
- Calvin Coolidge may have played golf, but we cannot be sure since he never mentioned it or, for that matter, anything else.
- Woodrow Wilson, straitlaced yet competitive, cheated in reverse—actually claiming a higher score than he'd shot. So as not to outshine the President, his Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo once recorded 3,056 strokes for nine holes, a world record.
- Richard Nixon played golf alone every Wednesday at 10 A.M. in a business suit. There are no known anecdotes.

As this noble pastime trudges ever deeper into the twenty-first century, churning up myriad divots in its wake, its long and fascinating history assures us that no matter what else happens, there will always be golf, even if the human race should become extinct.

(Lewis Grossberger writes the "Media Person" column for *Mediaweek*. He has also contributed to *Esquire*, *Time*, *TV Guide*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice*, *New York*, and humor anthologies "More Mirth of a Nation" and "101 Damnations.")

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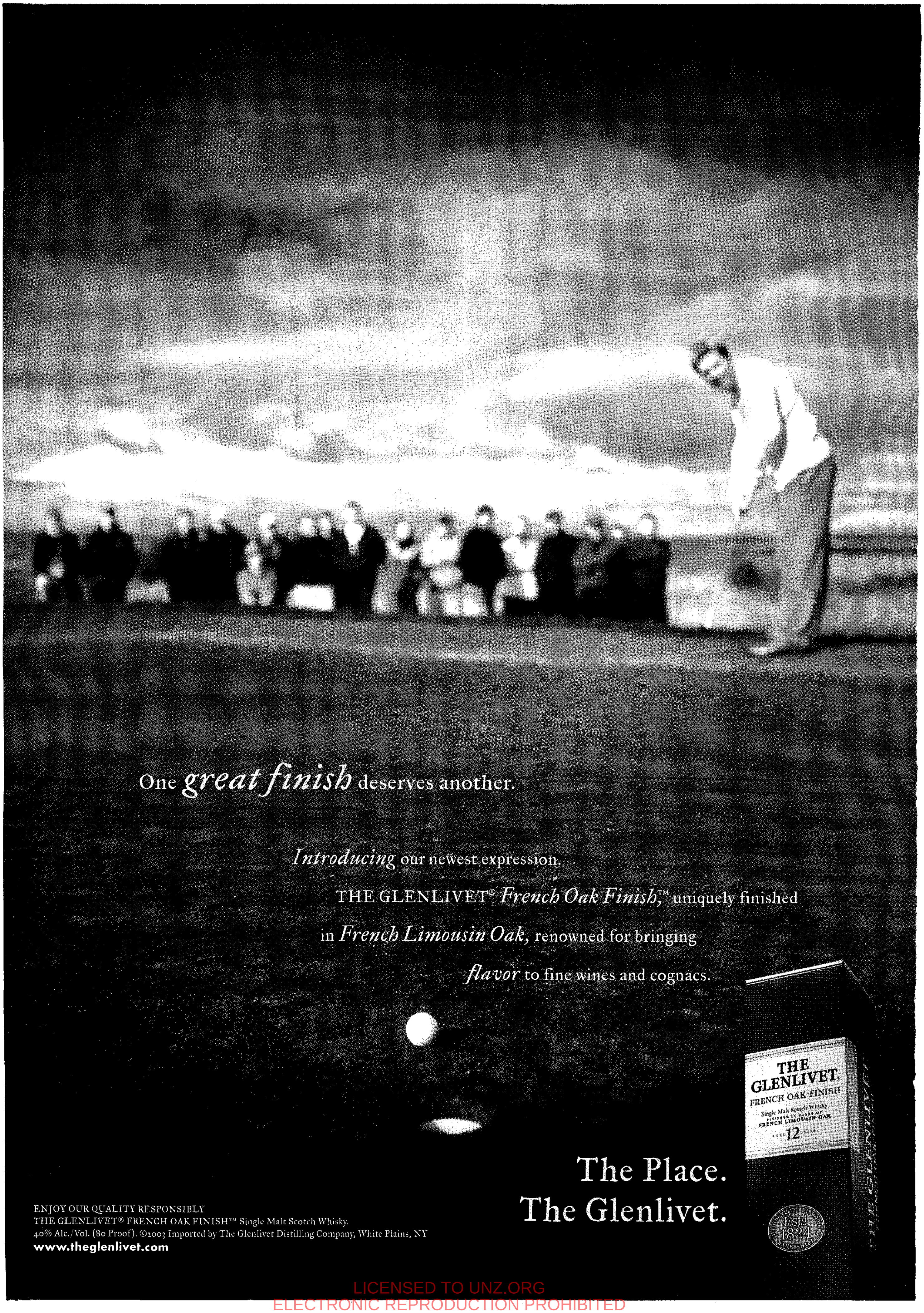
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DÉBUT FICTION

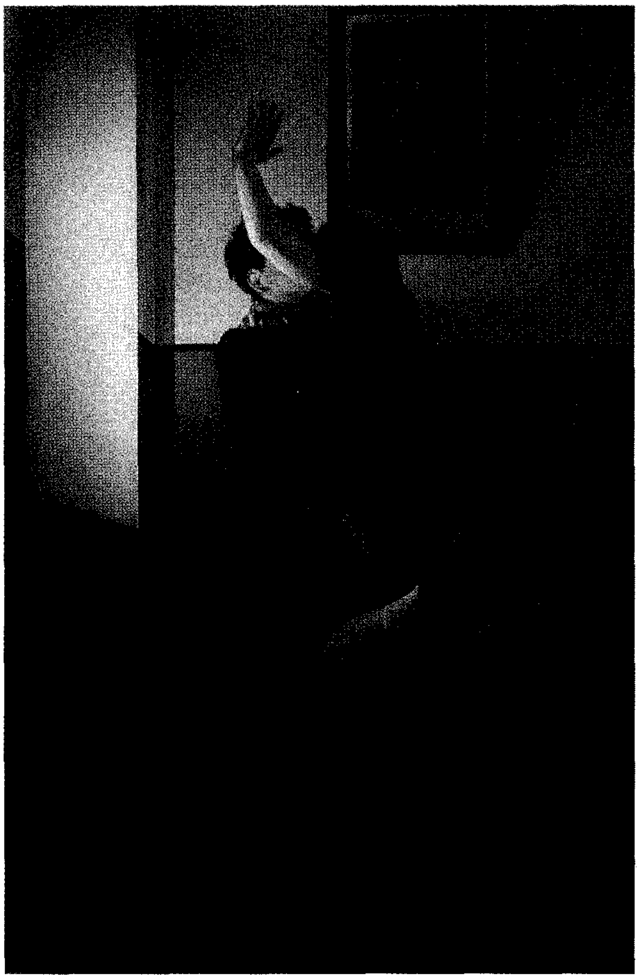
LOVE LESSONS MONDAYS, 9 A.M.

BY LARA VAPNYAR

The principal, Maria Petrovna, was a tall, heavy woman, well over two hundred pounds, with a bottom half that was heavier than the top. The students had nicknamed her the Pear. When she walked, the heels of her black pumps left marks on the linoleum. Without looking up, I could tell that she was walking toward me. My experience as a student had taught me that when the principal is approaching you it's best to keep your eyes down. I wasn't a student anymore, but I directed my gaze at my knees, which stuck out from under my gray pleated skirt. I hated my knees. They were bony, red, and often scratched or bruised. A little girl's knees, not a teacher's knees.

Of the twenty-two of us sitting along the walls of the teachers' lounge, I was the youngest. In fact, I wasn't even a teacher; I was eighteen years old, only in my second year of university, but the school had been desperate for someone to teach tenth-grade math. Except for Sergei, the history teacher, who was twenty-five and male, the other teachers were all women between the ages of thirty and sixty. They wore dark skirts and nylon blouses, and styled their hair in old, flattened perms. Some of the younger teachers applied mascara and lipstick, but the older ones wore no makeup at all and used the same cheap yellow soap that was supplied in the school bathrooms, so that their faces and hands smelled distinctly of school.

As Maria Petrovna marched around the room, she read to us from a thin brochure. She had the loud, deep voice of a person who talks for a living. But nobody seemed to be listening. Some teachers chatted; others read *Young Muscovite,* a daily paper that printed shocking stories—still a novelty in Russia in the early nineties. A few days earlier, I'd read an article about a dog that had bitten off its owner's genitals when the owner tried to rape it. And, a month earlier, I'd read about a gang called the Skinners, whose members kidnapped fat people, skinned them alive, and made hamburgers out of them.



KOMAR & MELAMID, "THIRTY YEARS AGO, 1953" (1982-83)/COURTESY RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

The brochure that Maria Petrovna was reading from was entitled "Sex Education: The Theses." The Ministry of Education now required every school to introduce sex education in the tenth grade, and Maria Petrovna had to pick two sex-education teachers. I had good reason to worry. Whenever there was an assignment that no one else wanted—supervising school dances or yard cleanings, taking the students on field trips to Lenin's tomb, or buying cakes for the teachers' tea—Maria Petrovna picked me. She always referred to me as "our young teacher," and her use of the word "young" made it sound like a mark of inferiority, of inevitable failure. Sometimes, she stuck her pink face inside the door of my classroom and watched my lesson for a few minutes, making me sweat, sputter, confuse words, and drop my chalk on the floor. If any of my students so much as stirred, she called out, "Shame on you! Don't you respect your young teacher? It's very hard for her to handle you, so help her! Show some respect!"

Sergei wasn't very old or experienced, either, but Maria Petrovna referred to him, with affection and awe, as "our male teacher," as if his gender alone were an admirable character trait. Naturally, he had been appointed to teach sex education to the boys. He didn't mind. He seemed to know enough about sex. Every Friday afternoon, a different smug girl in imported clothes stood waiting for him by the door of the school. Sergei would come out, slouching in faded jeans and a dark shirt with the top two buttons undone, carrying a jacket and a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He wasn't very handsome, but that didn't matter to me. From my fourth-floor window, half hidden behind dusty flannel curtains, I'd watch him walk up to the girl, give her a peck on the cheek, and put his arm around her waist. Then I'd let go of the curtains and sigh.

It wasn't that I was in love with Sergei. What I felt for him was nothing compared with what I had felt for Prince Andrei in "War and Peace," or for the math teacher from my home town, or for the actor Alexei Batalov, who played a dying nuclear physicist in my favorite movie, "Nine Days of One Year." I wasn't in love with Sergei, but I

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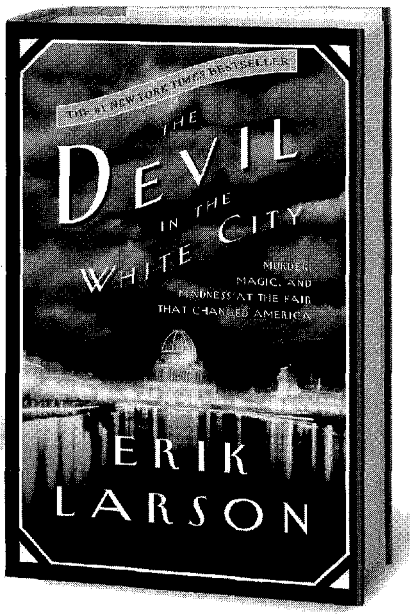
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would have liked him to look at me the way he looked at those girls.

Sergei was the only other teacher paying attention to Maria Petrovna. He sat with his sharp elbows propped on his knees, his light-brown eyes narrowed in concentration, waiting for an opportunity to make a fool out of her, as he did all the time. When Maria Petrovna proudly announced that our school had the lowest rate of unplanned pregnancies in Moscow, Sergei asked about the rate of planned pregnancies. I wouldn't have wanted to have a student like him in my class, but Maria Petrovna didn't seem to mind; she responded to his quips with a blink of her heavily painted eyelashes and a warm, all-forgiving smile. She smiled at him even when he didn't say anything.

Now she had moved on to a section praising countries where sex education was highly developed. "In the United States," she read, "ten-year-olds know how to use condoms!" Sergei's eyes lit up with excitement. "I wonder what they put them on," he said. I tried not to laugh, but a little squeal sputtered out, enough to attract Maria Petrovna's attention. "It's easy for you young people to laugh!" she said. When I raised my head, she was looking at me. "You think you know everything and we older people know nothing. Well, the time has come to share your knowledge." She dropped the brochure into my lap.

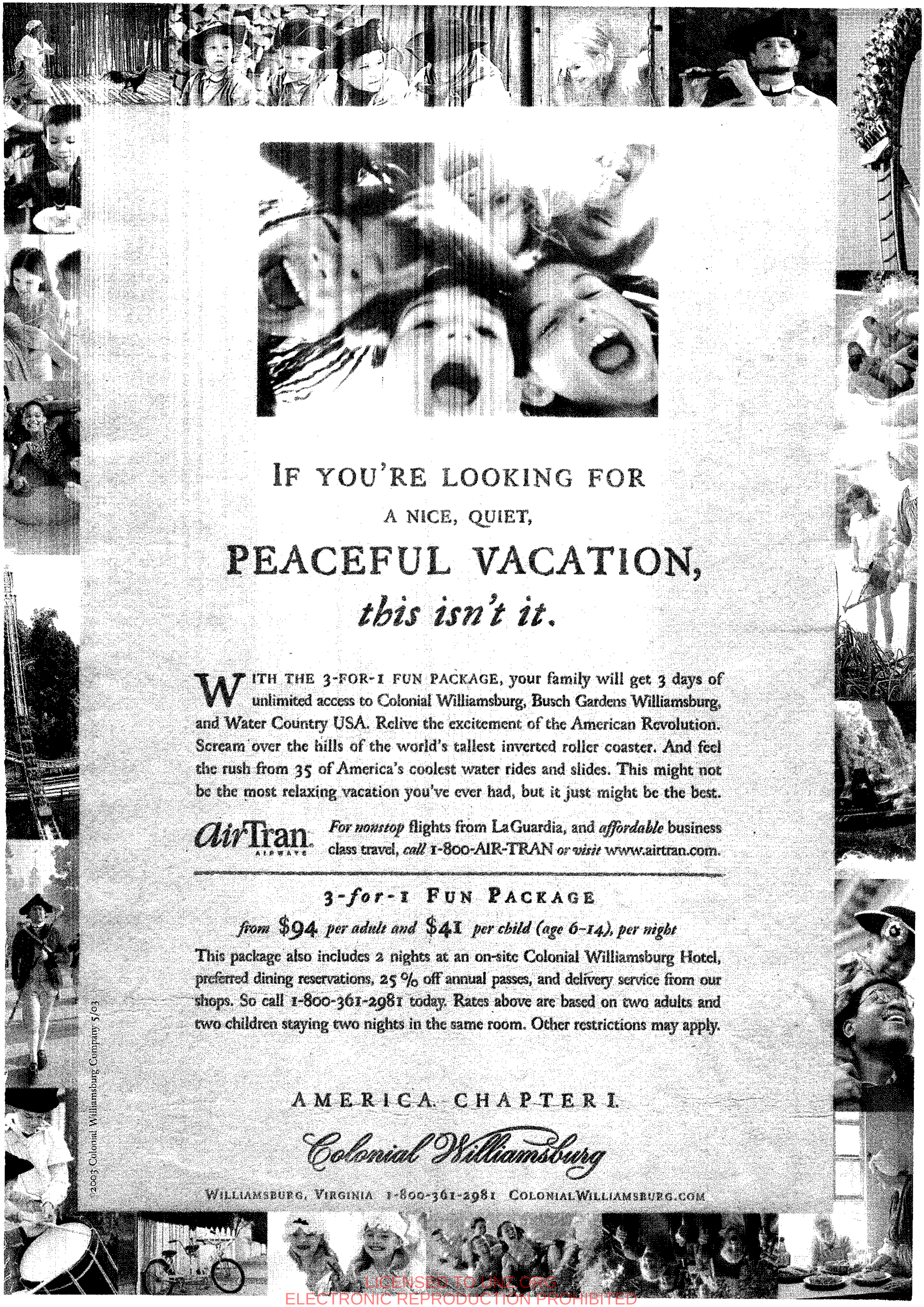
At home, I sat on the edge of my narrow bed and stared at the brochure. When I had moved to Moscow to study, my Aunt Galya had taken me in, and now I lived in the back room of her apartment, a room so small that when I sat on the bed my feet touched the wardrobe.

I had read the brochure twice, but it wouldn't have helped if I'd read it ten times. The authors did a good job of stressing the importance of sex education, and they'd included a detailed list of topics to cover, but there wasn't anything, not a hint, of what we teachers were supposed to say on those topics. On Monday, I would have to walk into my classroom and announce to the tenth-grade girls that I was there to teach them about sex. Would they laugh, or would there be a terrifying silence? Would they ask probing questions? And when I tried to answer them would they exchange knowing smirks, sly winks? If I turned my back, would I hear stifled giggles and feel that tickling sensation in my spine that I always felt when I knew they were mimicking me?

I wanted to talk to my mother, who was in our home town, thousands of miles from Moscow. But I knew better than to call her. I'd only start crying, and the connection would be so poor that I wouldn't be able to hear what she was saying. During my last months at home, everything about my mother had irritated me: her questions, her suggestions—even the sound of her voice. I couldn't wait to begin my new life. I hadn't even bothered to kiss her goodbye at the train station. But now I wished that I had somebody, anybody, to talk to. I'd been living in Moscow for a little more than a year. I'd lost touch with my girlfriends from high school, and I hadn't made any new ones. The Moscow girls seemed too snobbish and well dressed for me to approach. When I spoke to them, they furrowed their brows, as if I were speaking a foreign language that they had to struggle to understand. The girls who, like me, had come to the university from small towns all lived on campus. They had formed a tight circle, held together by their own specific interests. They talked about how to use forbidden electric teakettles, how to dry clothes on rusty radiators, how to sneak boyfriends into their rooms at night. They exchanged advice for dealing with hangovers, flooded toilets, and mean Muscovites. I couldn't be a part of this set. Simply by living with my aunt, I wasn't a part of it. What's more, precisely because I lived with my aunt, they considered me one of the Muscovites.

I noticed my distorted reflection in the glossy surface of the wardrobe, and I moved closer to the wall. Above my head, the photographs of Aunt Galya's two late husbands, Uncle Ivan and Uncle Boris, hung slightly off center on the faded wallpaper. Both men had stubby noses and small, gloomy eyes. They could have been brothers. Every morning, Aunt Galya climbed onto my bed, spat on the glass, and wiped the pictures with a dishrag.

Now I could hear her moving around in the living room, humming something out of tune and clearing her throat every



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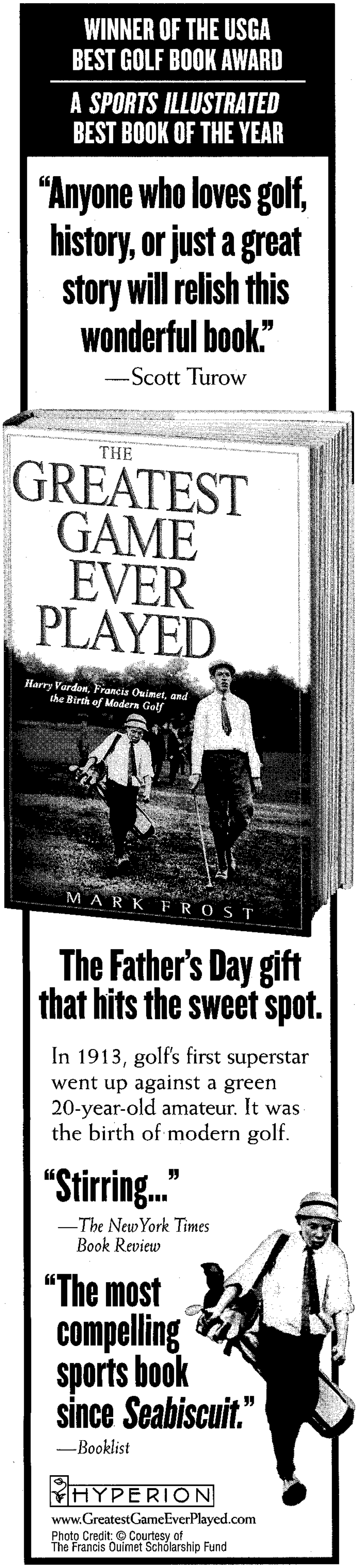

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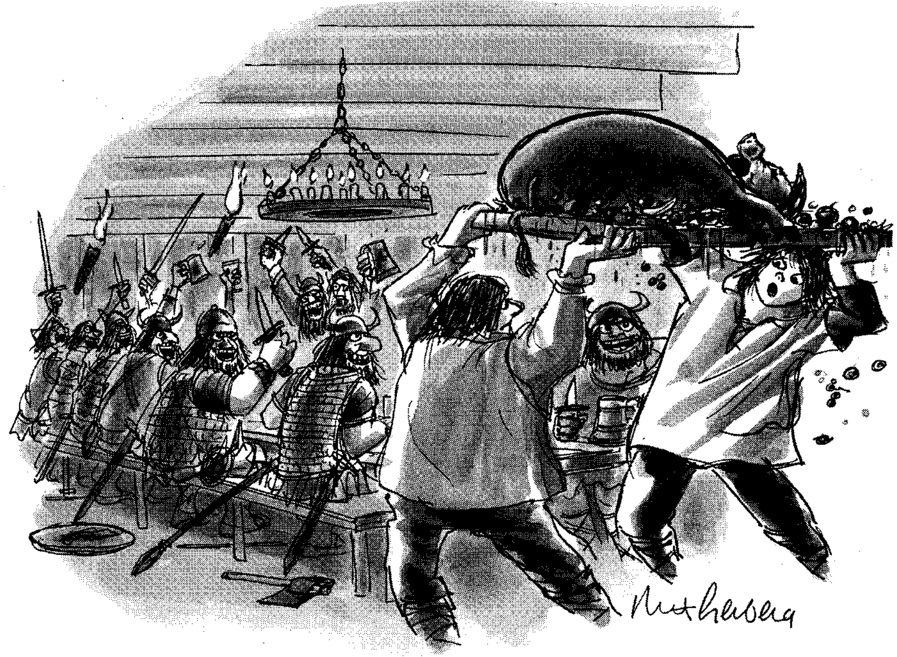
now and then—these were her subtle hints that she wanted my company. The humming and throat-clearing would get louder and more persistent, and soon she'd appear at my door and ask if I wanted a cup of tea. She appeared in my doorway almost every night, holding her faded silk robe across her large breasts. The robe had once been a kimono, but she had cut holes on one side and sewed buttons on the other, so that she could now button it up when she wanted to, but she never did. "Come, have a cup of tea with me," she'd say, but she never served me tea. I wasn't even sure she had a teakettle. Aunt Galya wasn't big on cooking. She usually ate her meals at the factory where she worked. On weekends, she had a bologna sandwich for breakfast, a bologna sandwich for lunch, and chocolates for dinner. Every time I came out of my room for "a cup of tea," she'd produce a glass jar full of turbid greenish liquid. This was moonshine, which she made herself, a fresh batch every Saturday morning, and kept in glass jars with old faded labels: "Strawberry Jam," "Dill Pickles," "Pickled Mushrooms." She wasn't as strong as she used to be—she was only fifty-seven, but a stomach ulcer had made her complexion sallow—so she never drank more than half a litre in the course of an evening.

Aunt Galya was a distant relative of my mother. In fact, they'd met only a few times. It had been very generous of her to take me in. My mother would have gone crazy with worry if I'd had to share a dorm room with three other girls—three "drunken sluts," in her words. And it would have been base ingratitude for me to refuse to sit with Aunt Galya and listen to her stories, so most nights I listened. The stories were either about Aunt Galya's dead husbands or about her countless admirers. I'd learned all their names, their addictions, their habits, and their physical peculiarities. I'd learned, for example, that Uncle Boris had a hairy back, that Uncle Ivan had small balls, and Uncle Ivan's best friend, Grigory, had even smaller ones.

Aunt Galya's footsteps stopped. She must have sat down. Long, drunken yawns were beginning to replace her humming. This meant that she would soon be falling asleep and I wouldn't have to come out and listen to her. On the other hand, even listening to her stories would have been better than sitting there alone, mourning my ruined life.

By Monday morning, I felt better. As I walked past the huge gray buildings of Moscow on my way to school, the crisp air stung my cheeks. The trees were stripped of leaves but



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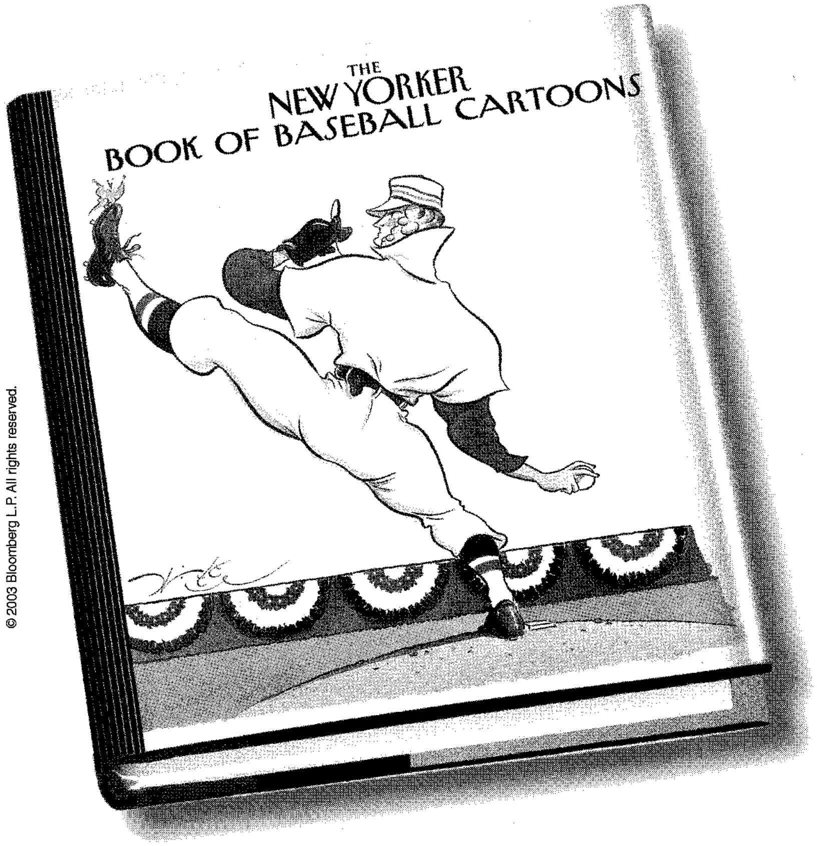
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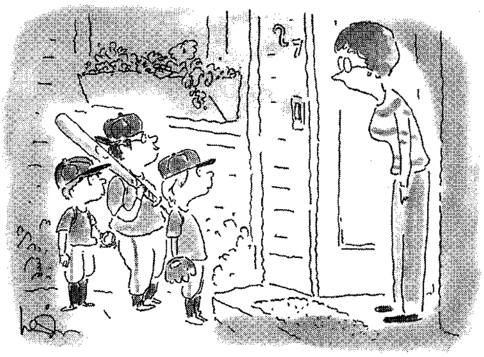

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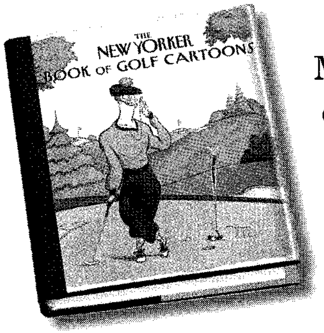
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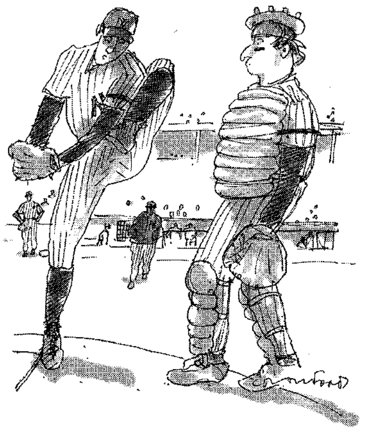

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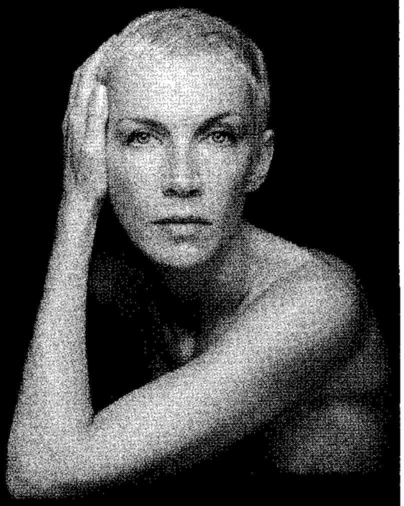

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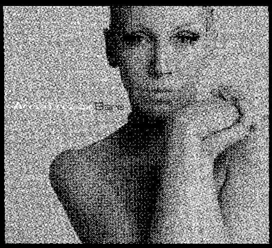

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not yet covered with snow. This made the streets appear wider. When I'd first moved to Moscow, the streets had seemed strange and hostile, but I quickly got to like them. They were like big rivers: wide, endless, and flowing. Everything—cars, people, leaves—was in constant motion, and as I walked fast, my scarf flapping in the wind, I felt swept up in the current. I caught a glimpse of my reflection in a supermarket window. Even in its murky, poorly washed glass I could see that I looked pretty.

The handle of my bag cut into my palm, weighted down by the book that I had checked out of the library over the weekend. The nine hundred and eighty pages of "The Nature of Sexuality" had been written by several authors, each one with a Ph.D. next to his name. It was the only book in the library with the word "sex" in its title. I shifted the bag in my hands. It also contained a bright folded poster that I had made the night before, by copying a diagram from the book.

I recalled that I had been frightened before teaching my first math class, too, but that had turned out all right. The students had sat quietly, leaning over their notebooks, and my voice had faltered only two or three times. Maybe my sex class would be all right, too. I had my book and my poster, and it wasn't as if I had no experience whatsoever. I wasn't a virgin. Or, at least, I didn't think I was. I wasn't entirely sure.

I arrived at school a few minutes earlier than usual, so I had time to pin my poster up on the board. I had made it by gluing together eight sheets of regular paper. At the center was a colorful drawing of the female reproductive organs, with their Latin names shooting outward like fireworks. I'd got the colors right, and I was especially happy with the intense purple of the uterus, a color I had created by applying blue paint on top of red. I wasn't as happy with the shapes and sizes, though. It had proved difficult to make the poster eight times bigger than the picture in the book and still maintain the right proportions. I could see now that one ovary was larger than the other. But at least the poster was eye-catching. Even intimidating. And that was a good thing.

I usually started my math classes by writing some difficult equations on the blackboard and demanding that they be solved in ten minutes. I called it "warming up," but my real goal was to intimidate the students. When I stumbled into the classroom every day in my mother's pumps, with parched lips and cold trickles of sweat running down my sides, they were already sitting there, all thirty-nine of them. Everything about them was terrifying: their pimpled foreheads and red fingers, their blue uniforms, darkened under the arms, the boys' cracking voices and enormous feet, the girls' awkward makeup. They could eat me alive. Math was my only weapon, because I knew it and they didn't. I wrote one equation after another, without a break. I gave them tests every couple of days and assigned excruciating homework. I was very strict about grading exams. Not a single mistake went unnoticed. Needless to say, I never smiled during my lessons. Behind my back, my students called me the Math Hound or simply the Hound. I didn't mind the name. It meant that I had them under control.

Once I had pinned up the poster, I pulled down the projector's screen to cover it until the appropriate time. I was ready. The girls straggled into the room, which looked strange with empty desks where the boys usually sat. (The boys had gone to Sergei's classroom, across the hall, for their lesson.) It was unusually quiet. The girls moved their chairs carefully to avoid making scraping noises, talked in whispers, and exchanged shy looks. "Good morning!" I said, and my voice rang out clearly. Although I always said those words at the beginning of math class, I wasn't prepared for the girls' reaction today. Instead of groaning, then sighing, then peering at their homework, they looked up at me expectantly. I had never seen them look this way before. Then something occurred to me, something that would have made me laugh if I hadn't been so nervous: They saw me as their teacher. They thought I possessed certain knowledge of sex the way I possessed certain knowledge of math. But, unlike math, sex was something they really wanted to learn about. A girl in the first row was tapping her foot on the floor. Another girl, by the window, rubbed her forehead with the cap of her

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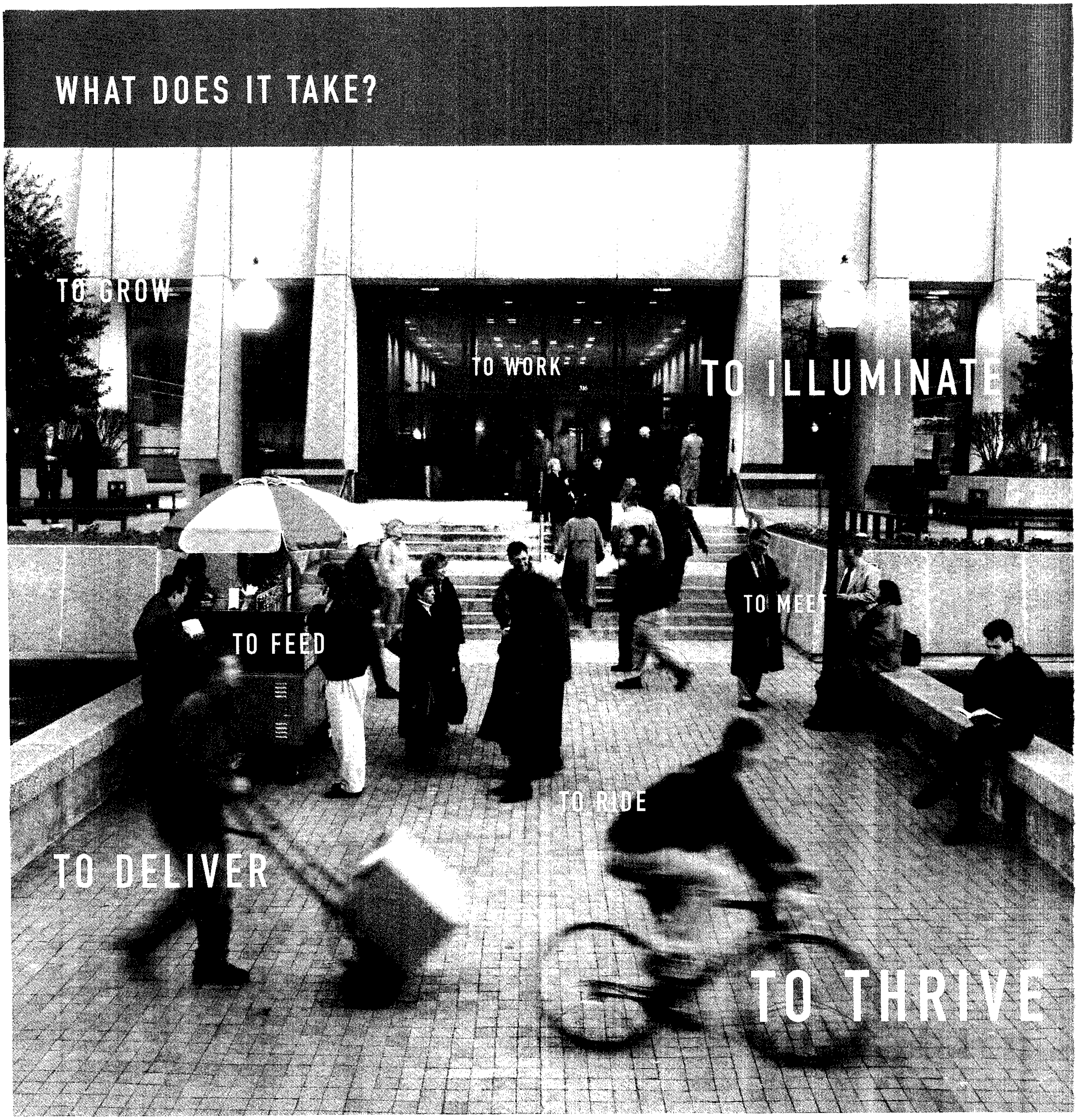
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pen. My best student, the pretty Lara Orlova, twisted her ash-blond curls around her finger. Suddenly, these girls didn't seem so scary to me. They were just girls as I'd once been, whose mothers, like mine, had probably told them only, "You'll figure it out when the time comes." I unveiled my poster and spoke the sentence that I'd been working on for the last two days: "We'll begin our lesson by studying the organs responsible for sexual functions in the female body."

Aunt Galya had come home early that day and was cooking when I arrived. As soon as I opened the front door, I felt waves of heat coming from the kitchen, and the sweetish smell of burned milk pervaded the hall. Something was gurgling under the lid of a big aluminum pot. I had never seen this pot before. Aunt Galya must have borrowed it from a neighbor, along with the green apron that was tied over her kimono. She stood beside the stove with a dishrag in one hand and a wooden spoon in the other. Every few seconds she raised the lid, let out clouds of white steam, and stirred whatever was inside. Her face was flushed. "I'm making kasha!" she announced. "It's good for the stomach. I had another doctor's appointment today, and guess what he said. That I should eat a lot of kasha and drink less!" Aunt Galya served us both on large gold-rimmed plates with crimson roses painted on them. We ate slowly, working from the outer edges of the plates to the center. The kasha was perfect—hot, heavy, and gluey. With each spoonful, I tried to wipe away the memory of my first sex lesson. None of my nightmares had been realized. Nobody had made fun of me; nobody had even smiled during the class. Yet somehow what *had* happened seemed even worse. The sentences that I had spoken, the questions my students had asked kept flashing through my head like lines from a movie. "What's that word in the upper part? 'Fungus?'" "No, that is . . . um . . . that is 'fundus.'" "Thank you." "Now, please copy these terms down: fundus, cervix, endometrium, Fallopian tube." "Will there be a quiz?" "Yes, I might give you a quiz."

Then Vera Bunina had raised her hand.

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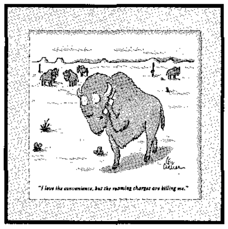

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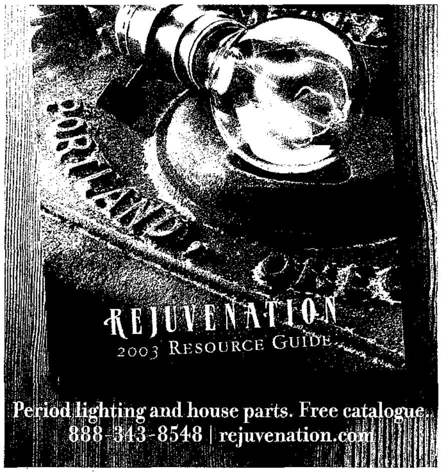

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Vera, a quiet, overweight, somewhat slow girl, was painfully shy. For her to ask a question, any question, was a big deal, especially since her classmates often picked on her when she spoke. She pointed at my poster with her pale, puffy hand and asked if every girl had "that," probably wondering whether "that" was actually as huge and unsightly as it was in my drawing of it. I expected the girls to laugh, but they just sat there silently staring at the poster. I wondered if they ever did what I had done back home. Shivering in our moldy bathroom, I had put my mother's hand mirror on the floor and squatted down, straining my neck to see between my legs. Afterward, I had lain in bed crying, appalled at how ugly it had looked. I had a startling vision of myself sitting at one of the desks among the girls, looking at the poster and feeling even more appalled.

The room emptied as soon as the bell rang. Then, while I struggled to take down the poster before my math lesson started, the door across the hall flew open and the boys spilled out in groups, all blushing, excited, giggling, some even laughing in coarse neighing laughs. I saw Sergei grinning in the doorway. Two of the boys blocked his way trying to ask him a question. He scrunched up his face and scratched his forehead, pretending to think, then he said something with a very serious expression. The boys laughed. Sergei prodded them out of his way and walked down the hall with his usual lazy gait.

As I scraped kasha remains from the bottom of my plate, exposing the crimson roses, I wondered what Sergei had talked about in his lesson. Perhaps he had shared some of his own experiences. Then he must have urged the boys to ask questions—to ask him anything they wanted to know. I wondered if I could do the same. Just talk to the girls honestly about my experiences, make them feel at ease, and encourage them to talk openly about their own lives. No, I couldn't do that. At home, I'd had only one unimpressive, even embarrassing sexual encounter with a boy. I couldn't possibly talk about that. Or about the fact that in the year I'd lived in Moscow nobody had asked me out. I tried to tell myself that it was just because I spent all my free time studying and didn't go to parties. But I did ride the subway and the buses, and I did go to the Lenin Library and to art museums, and I knew that you could meet someone at those places, yet no man had ever asked me for my phone number.

I was startled by a sudden tinkling sound. "It's time for my medicine," Aunt Galya said, pouring green liquid into her cup from a jar labelled "Eggplant Caviar." "The doctor said that drinking is bad for me!" She snorted. "Can you believe that? Drinking is what's kept me alive all these years! It's folk medicine. It goes way back." She drained her cup and blinked several times. She did look more alive after a drink. It brought some pink to her cheeks and made her eyes greener and brighter. You could catch glimpses of her former appeal. I wondered how much truth there was to her stories about love. Every time she stood up, straightened her back, and said, "Just look at this! Can't you see why men are so crazy about me?," I saw only an aging woman in a shabby kimono, with a blotchy face, a sagging stomach, bony hips, and pale, skinny calves with thin twisted hairs along the shinbones. Aunt Galya hardly looked like a sex goddess, but what if she did know something about sex? What if her love lessons were worth listening to? I had nothing to lose. I gathered up my courage and said, "Aunt Galya, do you mind if I ask you a few questions?" Her expression slowly shifted from incredulous to gleeful. She moved her teacup away and ran her hand through her short, wavy hair, preparing to speak. "Aunt Galya, wait!" I ran to my room for a notebook and pen.

By December, the schoolyard was covered with snow. It was on the school steps, on the window ledges, on the low concrete fence, on the lilac bushes by the fence. Sharp, leafless twigs broke through in places, making the bushes look like giant porcupines. Every morning, the janitor dug a trenchlike path in the snow from the

FACING UP

The last visitor left.
You closed the door and smiled at me.
I watched you cross Room 515 through
the flowers in vases, and your face
looked just like your face, smiling
down at me in my stupid green issue gown.
I felt myself want you
through the plastic tubes,
the vines around, across, and above me.
I felt myself want you
exclusively. Even pain faded
into the scenery as you leaned in
to kiss me. And I met your kiss
with my lips and we were both
folded into it,
into that clean, clean folding,
that soft longed-for kiss
across the side rails. That particular kiss
in its delicious oblivion hoisted us
above the suffering body.
We felt that long transfer of soft
for softness, that kiss lifting us
above the basement drawers
where we would finally face up.

—*L. B. Thompson*

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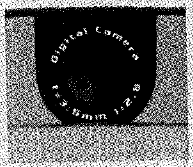

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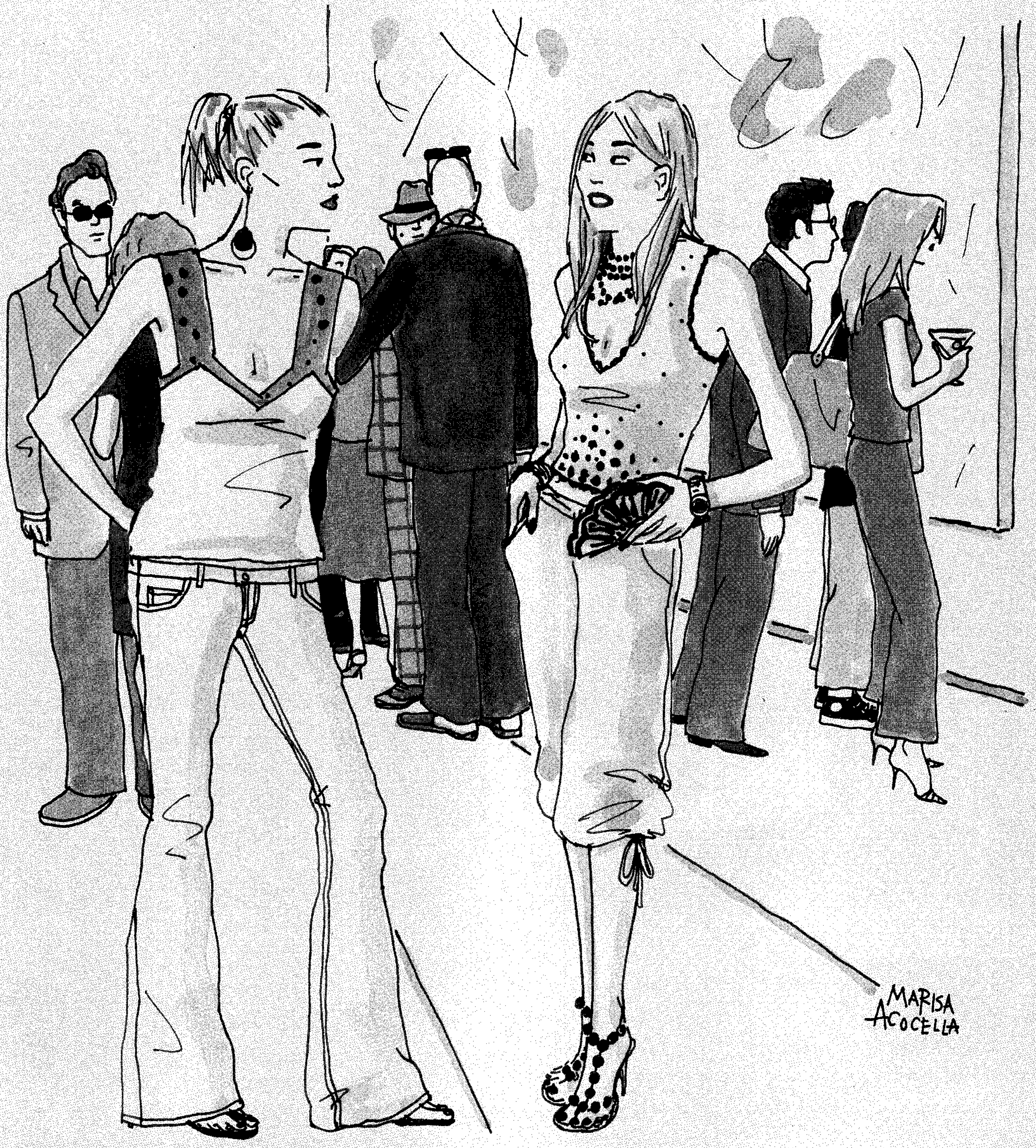
MARISA ACOCELLA

"IT'S CASUAL. WE'RE NOT IN EACH OTHER'S PALMS YET."

gate to the school. There was a long patch of ice in front of the steps, and the younger children loved to run up to the patch and then glide all the way to the door, screaming with pleasure. The ice patch was also the source of another kind of fun for the students, because teachers sometimes slipped and fell on it. Once, I saw our elderly chemistry teacher go sprawling onto the ice in her bulky fur coat. Although one of the ninth graders eventually went over to help her, the other kids just stared at her from the porch and through the school windows and laughed. Even the ninth grader who helped her up couldn't stop chuckling. Eight weeks into my sex-education class, that patch of ice had become my main concern as I walked to school.

I no longer felt anxious about my lessons. I thought of them as a dull but not unpleasant chore. My sex instruction wasn't a success, but at least I had managed to fill eight forty-five-minute lessons with information. I had learned how to make a digestible mixture from my three contradictory sources: "Sex Education: The Theses," "The Nature of Sexuality," and Aunt Galya. I usually used "The Theses" as a framework, Aunt Galya for details and examples, and the mammoth "Nature of Sexuality" for emergencies. Whenever I ran out of things to say, I threw in a Latin word or two.

It was sometimes difficult to steer Aunt Galya in the necessary direction. When she didn't feel well, she would talk only about the deficiencies and repulsive habits of her lovers, and of men in general. She slumped down on the couch with a bowl of kasha and described smelly breath, nasty sounds, and shrivelled body parts. She could go on and on, stopping only occasionally to eat a spoonful. Finally, she would get up moaning, dump what was left of her kasha in the garbage, and pour herself a cup of moonshine. When she felt O.K., she would sit at the table with a box of chocolates and talk about her heroic qualities as a lover, laughing heartily and devouring one chocolate after another. "He was lying there out of breath, all drenched with sweat, and I wasn't even tired! You should've seen the look on his face when I said, 'How about another go?' I thought he'd die right there." Oddly, the good sessions ended the same way as the bad ones: with a cup of moonshine.

I knew that my students didn't want to hear about bad breath or heroics. Techniques and precautions were what they needed to know. But it was hard to get Aunt Galya to coöperate. When she did respond, I grabbed my notebook and scribbled down the precious facts so that I could tell them to my students later. But I was still afraid of what would happen if the girls began asking questions. At first, they had been shy. They had sat there tense and silent, afraid to show any reaction. But, as the lessons progressed, they started to relax. They smiled or gasped or exchanged looks, sometimes whispering to one another. And then, one day, I saw a terrifying thing: Lara Orlova raising her beautifully manicured hand. I had a feeling that she wasn't just asking for permission to go to the bathroom. "Sometimes we want to know something in particular," she said. "Can we ask questions?" My stomach dropped. I fingered a piece of gum that was stuck to the bottom of my desk and thought, No! No! You can't! But Lara was still talking. "Could we ask questions anonymously? We could write them on pieces of paper and leave them here." I almost let out a sigh of relief. It was the perfect solution. It would give me enough time to consult a book or Aunt Galya.

The girls put a brown shoebox under my desk and started leaving their questions there every Friday after math class. There were only one or two questions a week, most of them from Lara Orlova. I recognized her neat, firm handwriting and perfect logic: "I read that oral contraception is ninety-seven per cent safe. Does that take into account the times when a person forgets to take the pill? If not, what would be the correct percentage?" Other girls' notes weren't as practical, and some were barely legible, with spelling mistakes and words crossed out. The questions covered everything from contraception to breast enlargement to appropriate behavior on a date. One girl (poor Vera Bunina, probably) asked, "What should I do if I am on a date and I really have to pee and I don't want the boy to know that I'm going to the bathroom?" Aunt Galya was annoyed by questions

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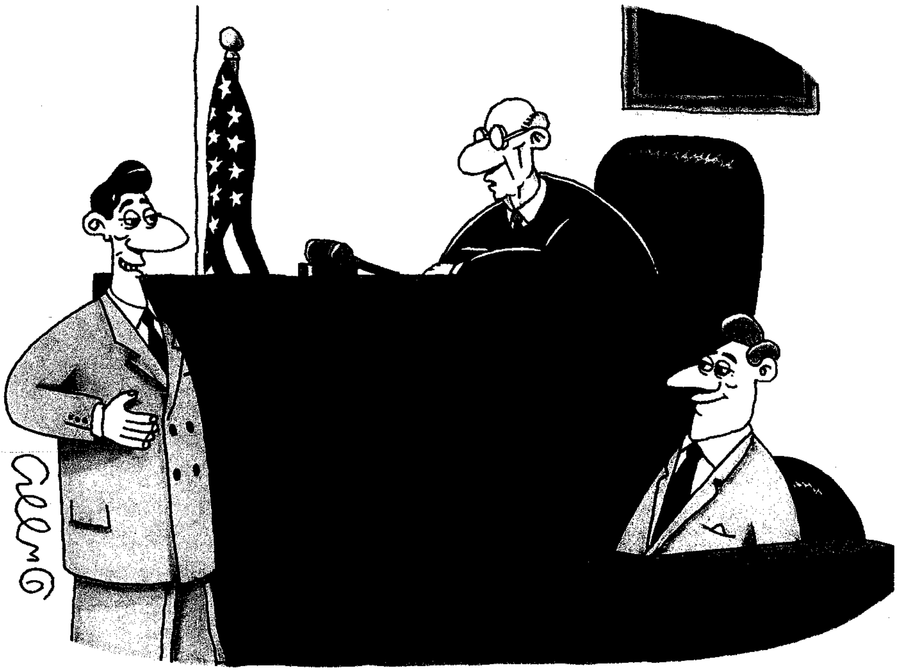
like that. "Let her pee in her pants if she is such an idiot!" I, on the contrary, liked these silly questions more than Lara's serious ones. I could imagine my girls going out on dates and experiencing these problems. I loved to act out the situations in my head and think about what I would do. At times, I actually enjoyed my lessons.

About four weeks into the class, the other teachers had started treating me differently. They never asked me about the lessons or made any remarks about them, but they became more aware of my existence. They still didn't consider me a colleague or admit me to their gossip circles, but they nodded when we passed in the hall and talked to me about minor events at the school: "Did you hear that a cafeteria window was broken?" I no longer felt as if I were living in a vacuum.

Sergei started noticing me, too. Sometimes I caught him looking in my direction with a questioning expression, as if he didn't know what to make of me. Or he'd stare at me and squint, as he did when he wanted to make fun of somebody, but then turn away again without saying anything. I was a perfect target for him—an incompetent sex-education teacher! It made me nervous, but at the same time I felt oddly flattered.

Maria Petrovna, on the other hand, began paying less attention to me. After asking to see my list of topics and collating it carefully with the one suggested by "Sex Education: The Theses," she was content to let me teach. She never stopped by my classroom during my sex lessons, either because she didn't care what I was saying or because she didn't want to be held responsible if I taught the girls something wrong.

My only problem was that after a while I started doubting Aunt Galya's expertise. At night I tossed under my thin woollen blanket and wondered, What if Aunt Galya is wrong? What if lemon juice isn't a good contraceptive? What if eating cabbage doesn't make your breasts bigger? What if having a lot of hair on your legs isn't a sign of infertility? What if drinking alcohol before and after sex doesn't prevent you from getting an S.T.D.? What if Aunt Galya's whole attitude toward men is wrong? The last question bothered me the most. Aunt Galya seemed to see men as soldiers in an enemy army. Or, worse, as soldiers defeated and captured. "Don't let them slip away!" "Make them work for it!" "Don't let them get lazy!" "Don't reward them until they deserve it." I had repeated everything she'd told me without questioning it. I looked at the portraits of her late husbands, glistening softly in the moonlight above my head. They didn't look very happy. And they were both dead.



"I'll handle the jokes, counsellor."

Sometimes during my math class, I would look at the boys and wonder how much they knew about my sex-education class. I wondered if Lara shared some of Aunt Galya's wisdom with her boyfriend, Sasha Smirnov. A few other girls had boyfriends in the same grade, and I was sure that they knew something. They avoided looking at me. They sat at their desks as quietly as possible, trying not to attract my attention. They acted as if I knew something bad about them, something that they didn't want me to know. A few times I felt an urge to go back on my words, to tell them that it hadn't been me talking, it had been Aunt Galya. But then I would think of Sergei. What if the boys had told Sergei about my lessons? Every time he looked at me with his new, questioning expression, I wondered if he was thinking that I was the one who hated men.

Finally, one lunch hour in the school cafeteria, Sergei spoke to me. The cafeteria served only two platters a day. On Fridays, we could choose between *sardelki* with beet salad and herring with mashed potatoes. I would have preferred *sardelki* with mashed potatoes, but you couldn't make substitutions. The *sardelki*, my favorite food, had hard skin and tasted better than the usual franks. I loved how the juice burst into my mouth when I bit into them. I hated beet salad—few things are more appalling than chunks of overcooked beet with potatoes and carrots swimming in a pool of smelly sunflower oil—but I put up with it for the sake of the *sardelki*.

I had just sat down at the teachers' table and poked a fork into my *sardelki* when Sergei tapped me on the shoulder. He stood by my chair with a plate of herring and mashed potatoes, grinning. "Don't let them slip away! Make them work for it!" He winked and walked to his usual place at the end of the table. My heart jumped up and down inside my chest. I spent the rest of the lunch break waiting for Sergei to speak again. I was sure that he had already thought of what to say—he was just waiting for the right opportunity. I had the horrifying idea that he somehow, through some unimaginable source, had become aware of Aunt Galya's existence and was going to ask about her. I stole a quick glance in his direction. He wasn't looking at

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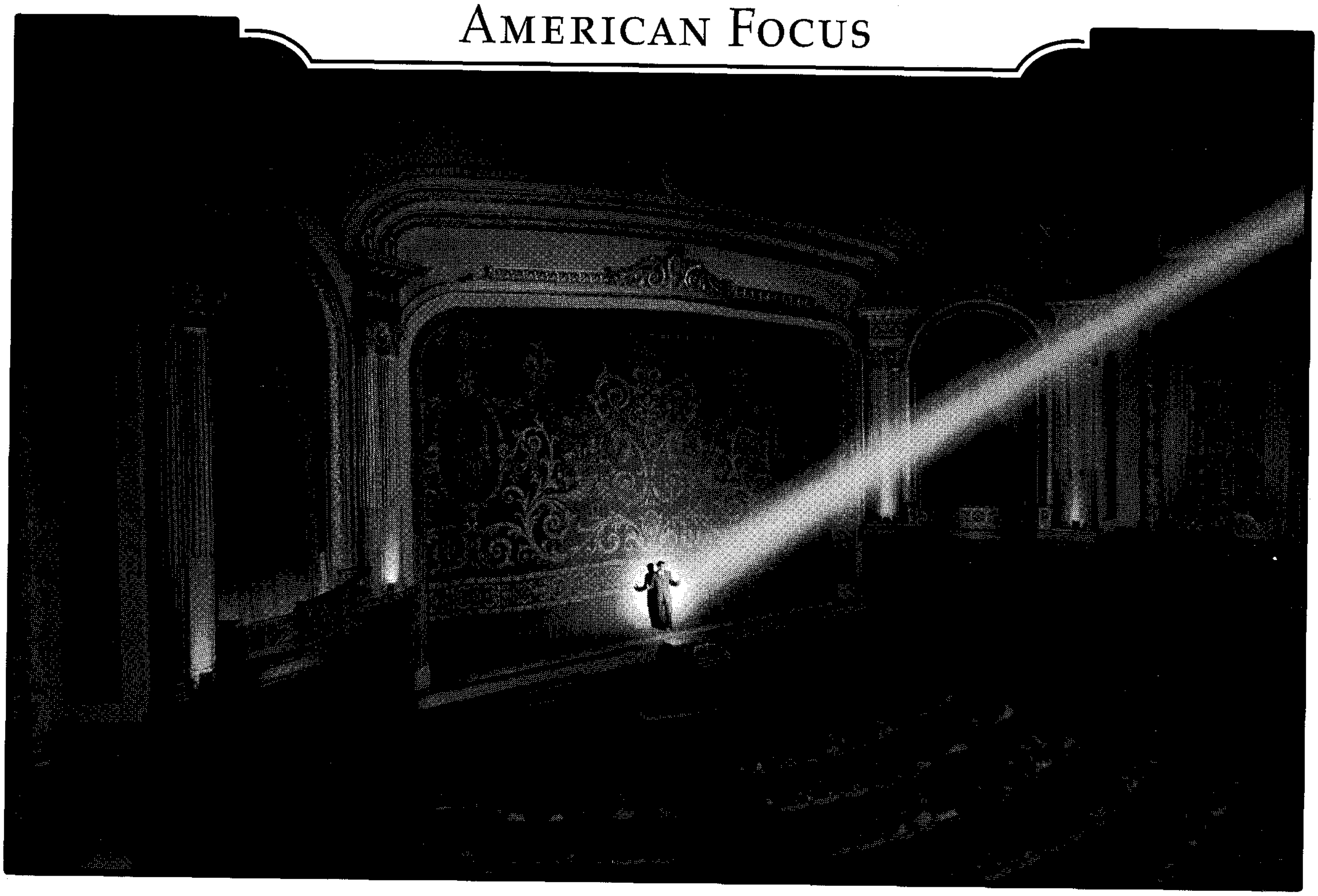

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me. He was working on his lunch, pulling bones out of the herring and laying them on the edge of his plate. It was a perfect chance to escape. I left my plate and hurried out of the cafeteria. I had almost made it to the exit when I heard Sergei's voice again, coming from somewhere close by, the words barely audible amid the cafeteria's steady rumble. I had to look up to make out what he was saying. He was asking me out on a date.

I had set the alarm for 8 A.M., but when I opened my eyes the following Monday the room was still dark, and my clock read six-thirty. I had come home from my date with Sergei at ten the night before and had taken off only my skirt and panty hose before I collapsed onto the bed and fell asleep.

Now I stuck my toes out from under the blanket and immediately pulled them back. The room was frigid. Normally, I would have stayed in bed, bundled up as if in a cocoon, until the alarm rang, but today I simply couldn't keep still. My limbs felt as if they were filled with tight little springs, longing to be released. I jumped up and tried to perform some aerobics on the little rug by the wardrobe, but my feet kept hitting the bed. For some reason, my reflection in the mirrored surface of the wardrobe—barefoot, with tousled hair—seemed incredibly funny. I plopped down on my bed and started laughing, pressing my hands over my mouth so as not to wake Aunt Galya. I thought of phoning home—my mother usually woke up early. I even took the receiver off the cradle, but then I put it down. I knew that I wouldn't be able to stop laughing, and my mother would think I was crying, and it would be impossible to prove that I wasn't. That, too, seemed very funny, and I sat and laughed until I became aware that I was famished.

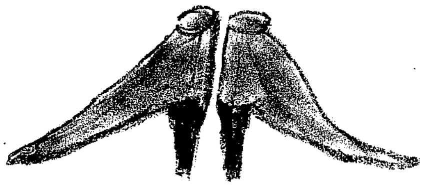
In the kitchen, I sprinkled a piece of rye bread with salt and ate it standing in the doorway. Aunt Galya was stretched out on her bed in men's striped pajamas, her blanket on the floor. She slept on her back, pressing a small pillow to her chest as if it were a Teddy bear. I walked over to her, covered her with the blanket, and tiptoed out of the room.

When I arrived at school, the street lamps were still lit, casting warm yellow rings of light onto the snow. The path from the gate had been freshly swept and the ice patch glistened. The schoolyard was empty. If I slipped and fell, no one would see me. I ran up to the ice, pushed off with one foot, and glided to the steps without falling.

In my classroom I opened a window, letting in an icy gust of wind. I sat down at my desk, then immediately stood up and walked to Tanya Myshkina's desk, in the first row. I couldn't sit there, either. I walked to the back of the room and sat in Vera Bunina's chair for a minute, then on the edge of her desk. It occurred to me that I was behaving just like Goldilocks, trying out my students' chairs. What if I told the girls about my date with Sergei? What if I told them about the look in his eyes? What if I told them how his hand had got stuck in the knot of my scarf when he tried to unbutton my coat in the crowded movie theatre? And how, later, he had kissed me all the way through "The Godfather: Part III," pausing only when he saw, in his peripheral vision, that one of the characters was about to be killed? What if I told them that the best part of the date wasn't even being on a date but walking to meet him at the Pushkin subway station, because men had turned to look at me as I passed? I wondered if the girls would understand it all.

Then I saw something that made the laughing springs in my stomach go still. The brown shoebox lay under my desk. I had forgotten to pick up the questions on Friday. I slowly slid off Vera's desk and went over to the box. Inside there was a sheet of notepaper folded in four. My first thought was to throw it away, to get rid of it, and pretend that the box had been empty. But what if, by some miracle, I knew the answer? I unfolded the note. About half the page was covered with firm, rounded letters. It looked like Lara Orlova's handwriting, but it wasn't as neat as her usual notes—she must have been nervous when she wrote it. I smoothed the paper in my hands and read the question quickly.

I read it a second time, this time out



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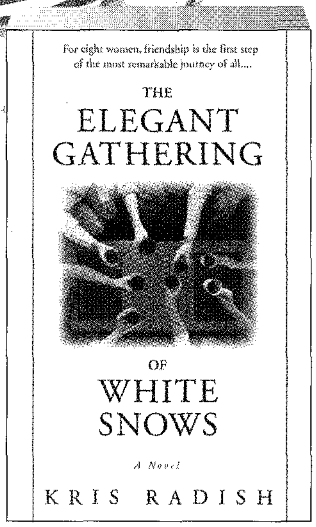
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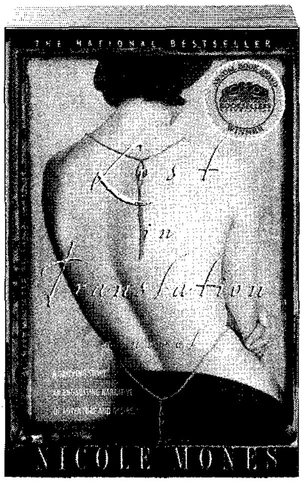
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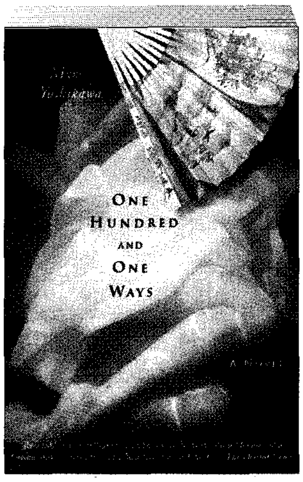
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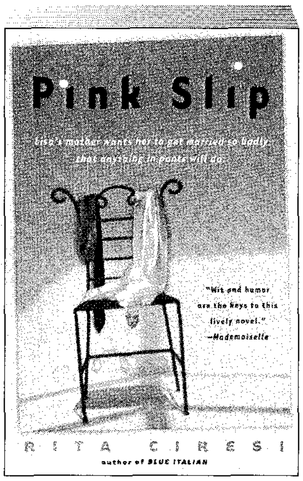
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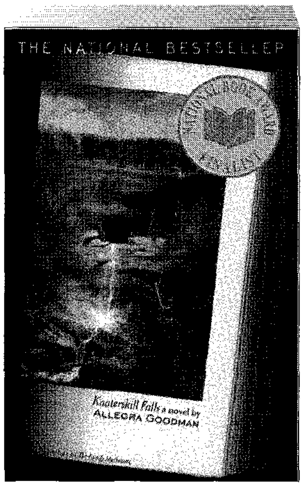
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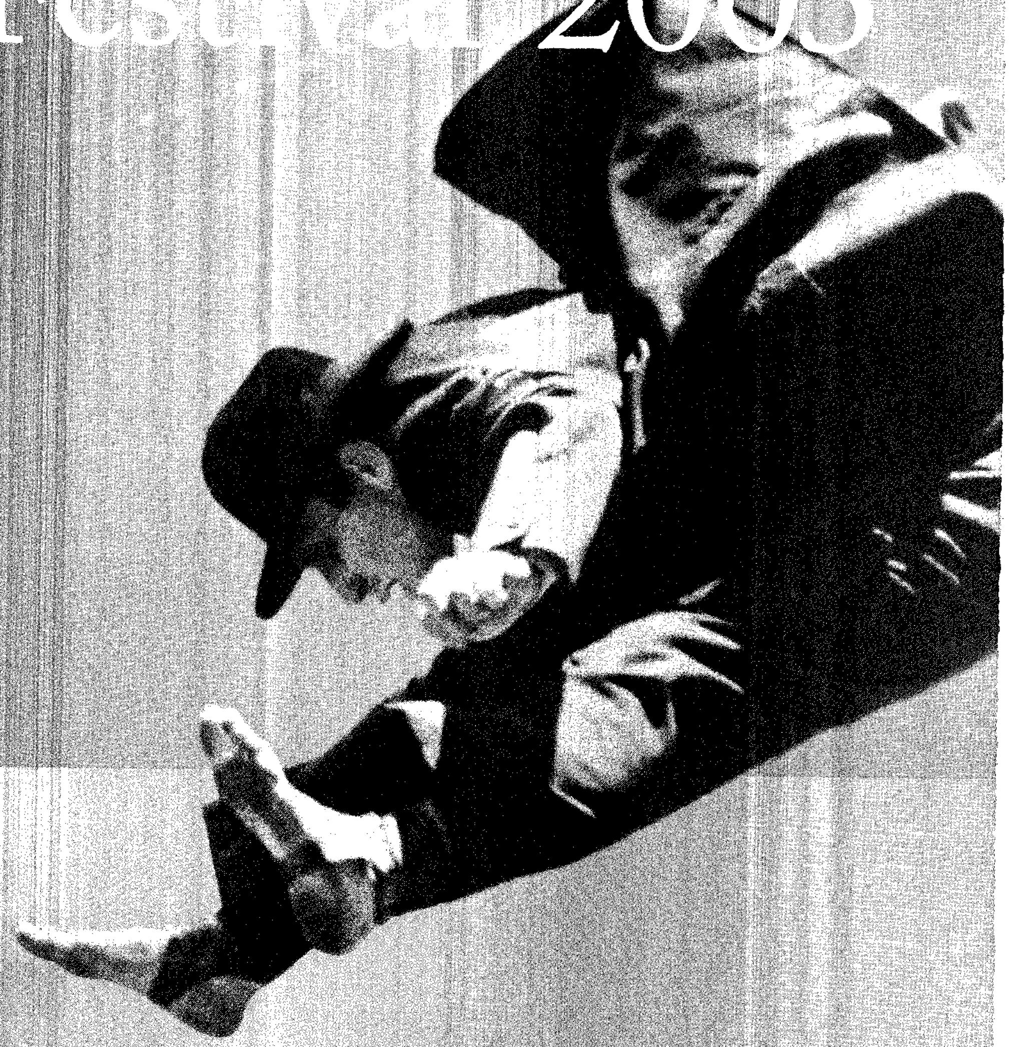

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Tickets to Dance Theatre of Harlem and Batsheva Dance Company are also available at the New York State Theater Box Office or through Ticketmaster 212.307.4100*

Tickets to The Kirov Opera are also available at the Metropolitan Opera House Box Office or through Met Ticket Service 212.362.6000*

www.lincolncenter.org

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*Ticket service charge will apply.

Lincoln Center Festival 2003 **www.lincolncenter.org** **CenterCharge 212.721.6500**

Special Advertising Section

From the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg

Kirov Opera

A co-presentation with
The Metropolitan Opera

"...ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED...OPERA COMPANIES IN THE WORLD." —*The New Yorker*

OPERA The Kirov Opera brings six extraordinary masterpieces to Lincoln Center. Some of Russia's best opera singers perform at the majestic Metropolitan Opera House with the Kirov Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Valery Gergiev.

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Semyon Kotko

Composer **Sergei Prokofiev**
Stage Director **Yuri Alexandrov**

Tues., July 8 at 7 P.M.
Wed., July 9 at 7:30 P.M.
Sat., July 12 at 12:30 P.M.

Khovanshchina

Composer **Modest Mussorgsky**
Original Stage Director
Leonid Baratov
Restaged **Yuri Alexandrov**

Thurs., July 10 at 7:30 P.M.
Fri., July 11 at 7:30 P.M.
Mon., July 14 at 7:30 P.M.
Mon., July 21 at 7:30 P.M.

Macbeth

Composer **Giuseppe Verdi**
Stage Director **David McVicar**

Sat., July 12 at 8 P.M.
Fri., July 18 at 7:30 P.M.
Wed., July 23 at 7:30 P.M.
Sat., July 26 at 12:30 P.M.

The Demon

The Demon will be performed in concert.
Composer **Anton Rubinstein**

Tues., July 15 at 7:30 P.M.

Free Symposium
Wed., July 9 at 5:00 P.M.

Artistic and General Director **Valery Gergiev**

Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre

Met Titles in English at every performance

METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE
Tickets: $20, 35, 55, 85, 105, 150, 250*

*Limited quantity available

The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh

Composer **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**
Stage Director **Dmitry Cherniakov**

Wed., July 16 at 7 P.M.
Thurs., July 17 at 7 P.M.
Sat., July 19 at 12:30 P.M.
Fri., July 25 at 7 P.M.

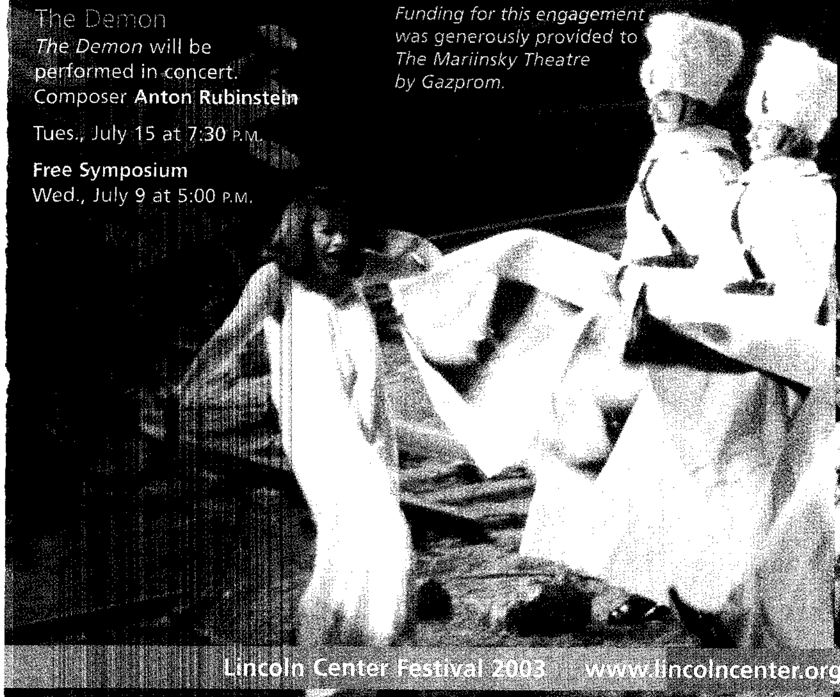
Eugene Onegin

Composer **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**
Stage Directors **Moshe Leiser, Patrice Caurier**

Sat., July 19 at 8 P.M.
Tues., July 22 at 7:30 P.M.
Thurs., July 24 at 7:30 P.M.
Sat., July 26 at 8 P.M.

Lincoln Center Festival and The Metropolitan Opera are deeply grateful to Cecile and Ezra Zilkha, Chris and Bruce Crawford, the Jerome L. Greene Foundation, Karen and Kevin Kennedy, Barbara and Robert Liberman, Robert W. Wilson and an anonymous donor for their support of this presentation of the Kirov Opera.

Funding for this engagement was generously provided to The Mariinsky Theatre by Gazprom.



"WIDELY CONSIDERED ONE OF EUROPE'S MOST ORIGINAL CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS" —*The New York Times* on Salvatore Sciarrino

Macbeth

OPERA Salvatore Sciarrino returns with the chilling, contemporary spectacle of Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*.

U.S. PREMIERE

Composer
Salvatore Sciarrino
Director and Set design
Achim Freyer
Co-Director
Friederike Rinne-Wolf
Conductor
Johannes Debus

Oper Frankfurt
Ensemble Modern

Performed in Italian with English supertitles.

Wed., July 9 at 8:30 P.M.
Thurs., July 10 at 8:30 P.M.
Fri., July 11 at 8:30 P.M.
Sat., July 12 at 8:30 P.M.

JOHN JAY COLLEGE THEATER
Tickets: $55

Co-production of Oper Frankfurt, Schwetzingen Festival, and Musica per Roma.

Major support provided by The Alice Tully Foundation.

Chamber Music of Salvatore Sciarrino

New Juilliard Ensemble
PAUL HALL
THE JUILLIARD SCHOOL
Tues., July 15 at 8 P.M.
Free. No Tickets Required.

Presented in association with The Juilliard School.

Lincoln Center Festival 2003 www.lincolncenter.org CenterCharge 212.721.6500

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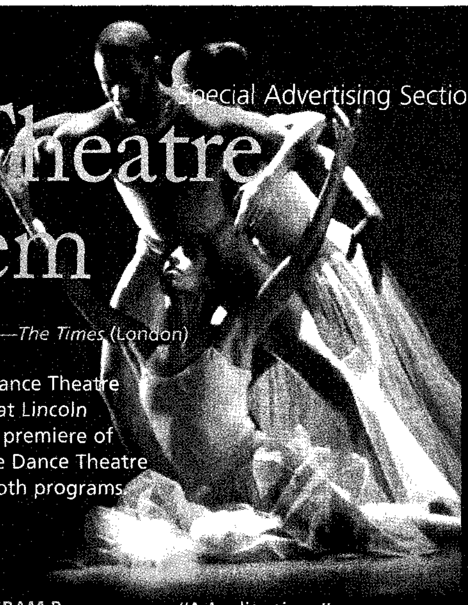


Dance Theatre of Harlem

"A WORLD-CLASS BALLET COMPANY." —*The Times* (London)

DANCE Catch the sublime spirit of Dance Theatre of Harlem with its first appearance at Lincoln Center Festival, featuring the world premiere of *St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet*. The Dance Theatre of Harlem Orchestra performs for both programs.

Founder and Artistic Director
Arthur Mitchell

PROGRAM A
Tues., July 8 at 8 P.M.
Sat., July 12 at 2 & 8 P.M.
Sun., July 13 at 3 P.M.

The Four Temperaments
Music **Paul Hindemith**
Choreographer
George Balanchine

WORLD PREMIERE

St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet
Based on the musical
St. Louis Woman
Music **Harold Arlen**
Lyrics **Johnny Mercer**
Book **Arna Bontemps**
and **Countee Cullen**
Choreographer
Michael Smuin
Original concept/
librettist **Jack Wrangler**

PROGRAM B
Wed., July 9 at 8 P.M.
Thurs., July 10 at 8 P.M.
Fri., July 11 at 8 P.M.

Serenade
Music
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Choreographer
George Balanchine

New Bach
Music **J.S. Bach**, Violin
Concerto in A minor
Choreographer
Robert Garland

Free Symposium
Fri., July 11 at 6:00 P.M.

"Meditation" from Thaïs
Music **Jules Massenet**
Choreographer
Sir Frederick Ashton

Fancy Free
Music **Leonard Bernstein**
Choreographer
Jerome Robbins

NEW YORK STATE THEATER
Tickets: $25, 40, 55, 65, 75

Generous support provided by The Harkness Foundation for Dance.

Additional support provided by Carol and Earle I. Mack.

Serenade, choreography by George Balanchine ©The George Balanchine Trust

Shen Wei Dance Arts

"...STARTLINGLY IMAGINATIVE." —*The New York Times*

DANCE For the first time, choreographer Shen Wei and his celebrated dance company—Shen Wei Dance Arts—perform in New York City. Shen organically fuses the boundaries between Chinese opera, modern dance, and the visual arts to create mesmerizing works of dance.

Artistic Director **Shen Wei**

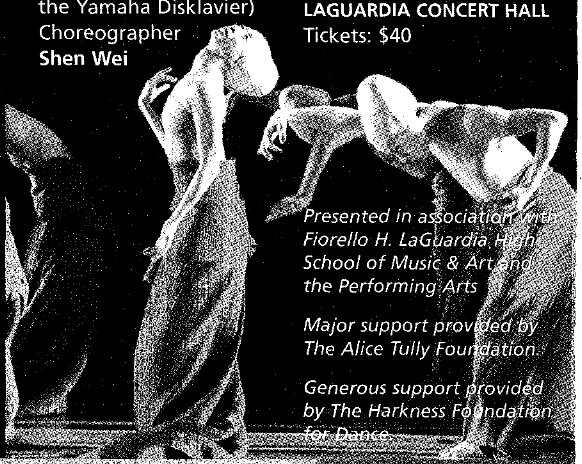
NEW YORK PREMIERES

The Rite of Spring
Composer **Igor Stravinsky**
Pianist **Fazil Say**
(Original version for four hands played on the Yamaha Disklavier)
Choreographer
Shen Wei

Folding
Music **John Tavener, Tibetan Buddhist chants**
Choreographer **Shen Wei**

Wed., July 23 at 8 P.M.
Fri., July 25 at 8 P.M.
Sat., July 26 at 8 P.M.

LAGUARDIA CONCERT HALL
Tickets: $40



Presented in association with Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and the Performing Arts

Major support provided by The Alice Tully Foundation.

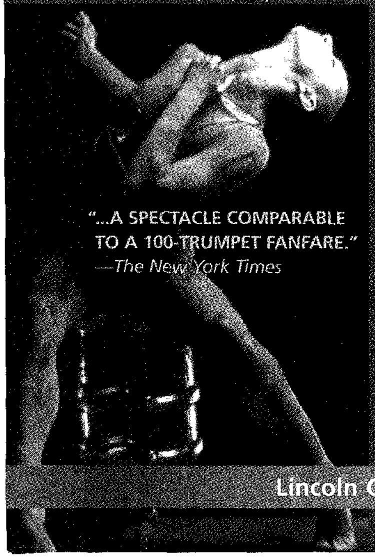
Generous support provided by The Harkness Foundation for Dance.

Anaphaza

DANCE Reeling with raw energy, adrenaline, and humor, Batsheva Dance Company's *Anaphaza* is charged with emotional and physical vivacity. Ohad Naharin has ushered Israel's premier dance company into the international spotlight with his defining vision.

Wed.–Sat.,
July 23-26 at 8 P.M.

NEW YORK STATE THEATER
Tickets: $25, 40, 55, 65



"...A SPECTACLE COMPARABLE TO A 100-TRUMPET FANFARE."
—*The New York Times*

Batsheva Dance Company
Artistic Director **Ohad Naharin**

NEW YORK PREMIERE

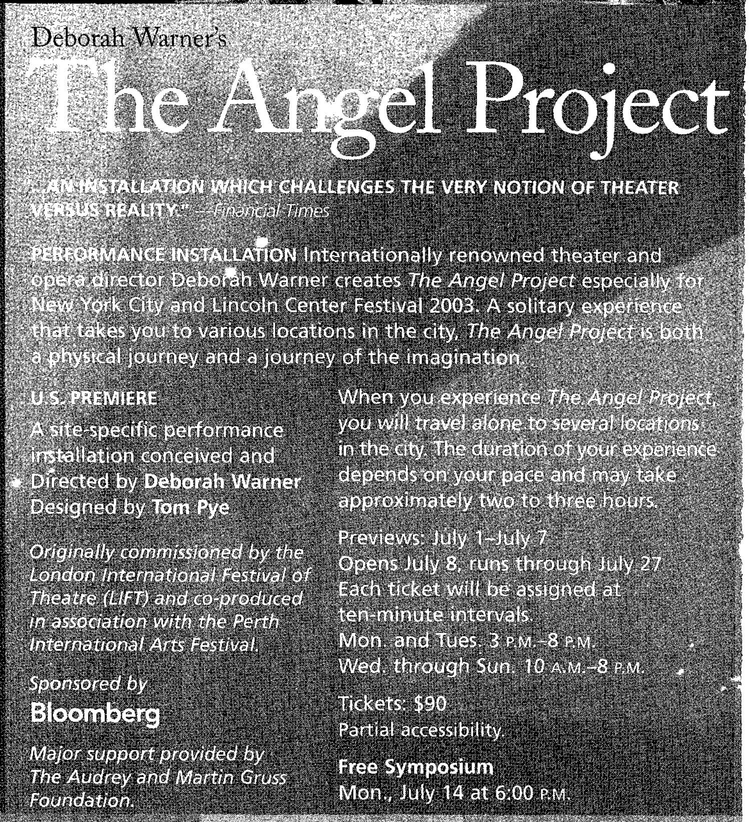
Music **Aaron Copland, Guem, Arvo Pärt, Rolf Wallin, Dani Makov, Avi Belleli, Ohad Naharin**

Choreographer **Ohad Naharin**

Generous support provided by The Harkness Foundation for Dance.

Additional support provided by The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Carol and Earle I. Mack, and The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

This performance is made possible with public funds from the New York-Israel Cultural Cooperation Commission, a joint venture of the State of Israel and the State of New York, George E. Pataki, Governor.



Deborah Warner's

The Angel Project

"...AN INSTALLATION WHICH CHALLENGES THE VERY NOTION OF THEATER VERSUS REALITY." —*Financial Times*

PERFORMANCE INSTALLATION Internationally renowned theater and opera director Deborah Warner creates *The Angel Project* especially for New York City and Lincoln Center Festival 2003. A solitary experience that takes you to various locations in the city, *The Angel Project* is both a physical journey and a journey of the imagination.

U.S. PREMIERE

A site-specific performance installation conceived and Directed by **Deborah Warner**
Designed by **Tom Pye**

Originally commissioned by the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) and co-produced in association with the Perth International Arts Festival.

Sponsored by
Bloomberg

Major support provided by The Audrey and Martin Gruss Foundation.

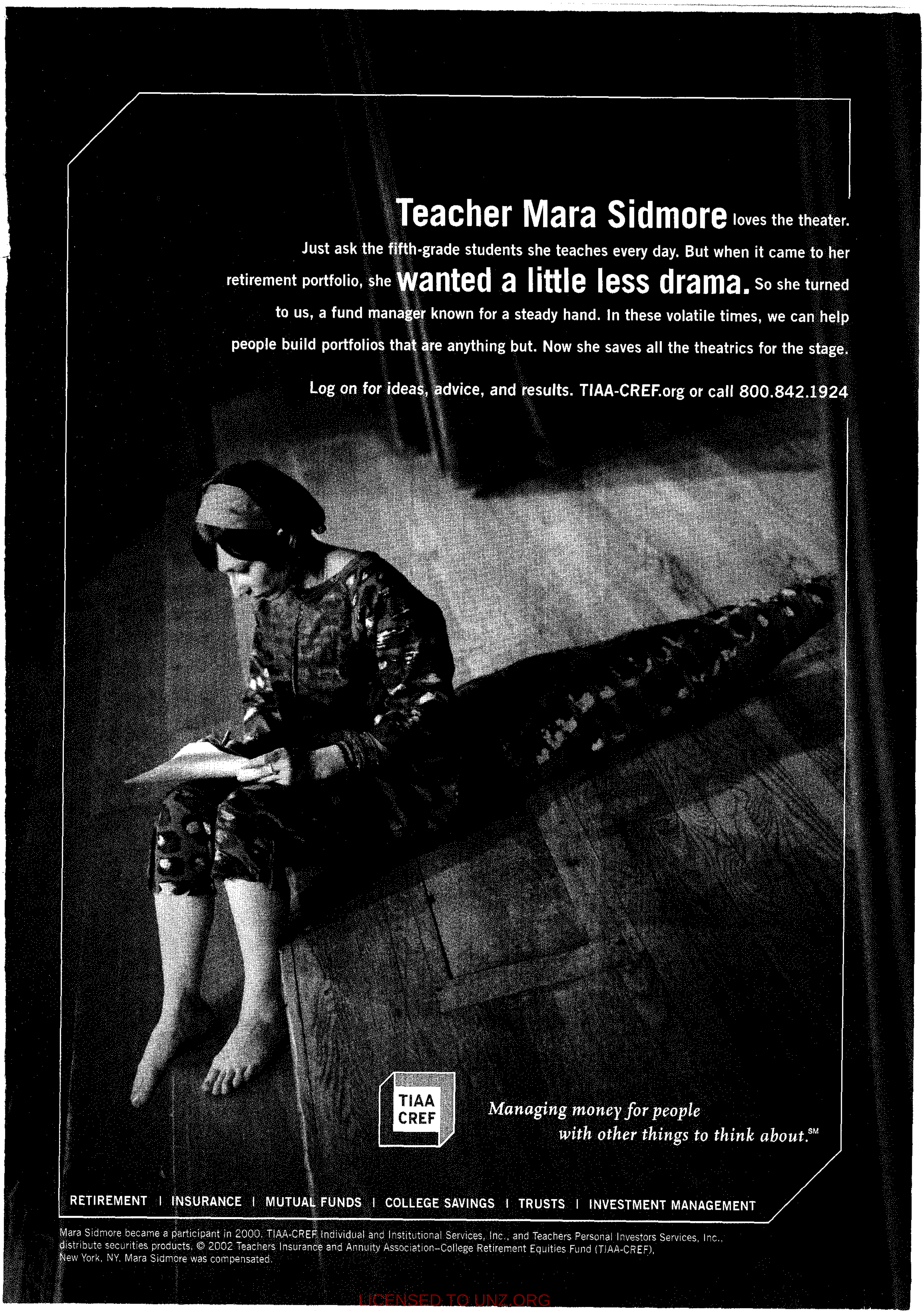
When you experience *The Angel Project*, you will travel alone to several locations in the city. The duration of your experience depends on your pace and may take approximately two to three hours.

Previews: July 1–July 7
Opens July 8, runs through July 27
Each ticket will be assigned at ten-minute intervals.
Mon. and Tues. 3 P.M.–8 P.M.
Wed. through Sun. 10 A.M.–8 P.M.

Tickets: $90
Partial accessibility

Free Symposium
Mon., July 14 at 6:00 P.M.

Lincoln Center Festival 2003 www.lincolncenter.org CenterCharge 212.721.6500

**Teacher Mara Sidmore** loves the theater.

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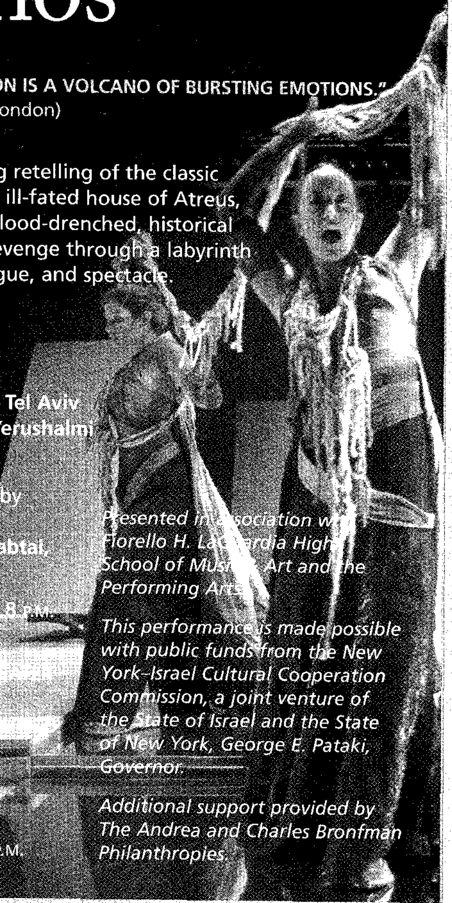
Special Adve

Mythos

"THE ENTIRE PRODUCTION IS A VOLCANO OF BURSTING EMOTIONS."
—*Plays International,* (London)



THEATER A penetrating retelling of the classic Greek myth about the ill-fated house of Atreus, *Mythos* explores the blood-drenched, historical cycle of murder and revenge through a labyrinth of music, dance, dialogue, and spectacle.

Itim Theatre Ensemble
in collaboration with
The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv
Artistic Director **Rina Yerushalmi**

U.S. PREMIERE

Adapted and directed by
Rina Yerushalmi
Translation **Aharon Shabtai, Shimon Buzaglo**

Tues.–Sat., July 8–12 at 8 P.M.
Sun., July 13 at 3 P.M.

LAGUARDIA DRAMA THEATER
Tickets: $55

Performed in Hebrew
with simultaneous
English translation

Free Symposium
Thurs., July 10 at 6:00 P.M.

Presented in association with Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and the Performing Arts

This performance is made possible with public funds from the New York–Israel Cultural Cooperation Commission, a joint venture of the State of Israel and the State of New York, George E. Pataki, Governor

Additional support provided by The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies

The Orphan of Zhao

MUSIC THEATER

赵氏孤儿 The Orphan of Zhao (English)

The Orphan of Zhao (Chinese)

[illegible]

Free Symposium
Thurs., July 24 at 6:00 P.M.

Original music by Stephen Merritt

A contemporary take on the classic

Fri., July 18 at 8:30 P.M. (Preview)
[illegible]
Tues.–Sat., July 22–26 at 8:30 P.M.
[illegible]

LAGUARDIA DRAMA THEATER
Tickets: $55

Presented in association with Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and the Performing Arts

The Orphan of Zhao (in English) is produced by The Lincoln Center Festival and Lincoln Center Theater.

"IT'S OBVIOUS WHY KIM IS A NATIONAL TREASURE WHEN YOU SEE HER PERFORM. SHE INVOKES SPIRITS WITH REMARKABLE SKILL." —*Los Angeles Times*

Shaman Ritual

One Performance Only!

THEATER Korean shaman Kim Keum-hwa and her 17 master artists and assistants bless New York City with their spectacular ritual performance. Kim Keum-hwa summons and receives spirits through a series of ritualistic dances, songs, and acts. Established long before Taoism, Buddhism, or Christianity, these ceremonies are central to Korean culture.

Daedong Gut
(Korean Shaman Ritual)
Performed by Mudang
(Shaman)
Kim Keum-hwa

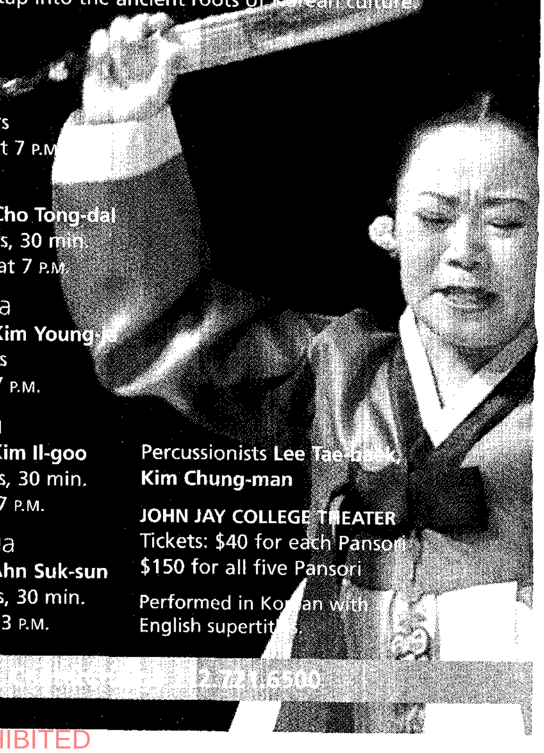
JOHN JAY COLLEGE THEATER
Tues., July 15 at 7 P.M.
Tickets: $40

Free Symposium
Tues., July 15 at 6:00 P.M.

Pansori

"PANSORI CONTAINS THE KOREAN PEOPLE'S SOUL." —*Korea Times*

MUSIC THEATER Experience Korea's greatest oral tradition when Lincoln Center Festival 2003 presents the five remaining pansori. Each solo epic drama features a master singer, *gwangdae*, and a drummer, *gosu*. These amazing epics tap into the ancient roots of Korean culture.



Heungboga
Performed by
Kim Soo-yeon
Approx. 2 hours
Wed., July 16 at 7 P.M.

Sugungga
Performed by **Cho Tong-dal**
Approx. 3 hours, 30 min.
Thurs., July 17 at 7 P.M.

Simcheongga
Performed by **Kim Young-ja**
Approx. 4 hours
Fri., July 18 at 7 P.M.

Jeokbyeokga
Performed by **Kim Il-goo**
Approx. 3 hours, 30 min.
Sat., July 19 at 7 P.M.

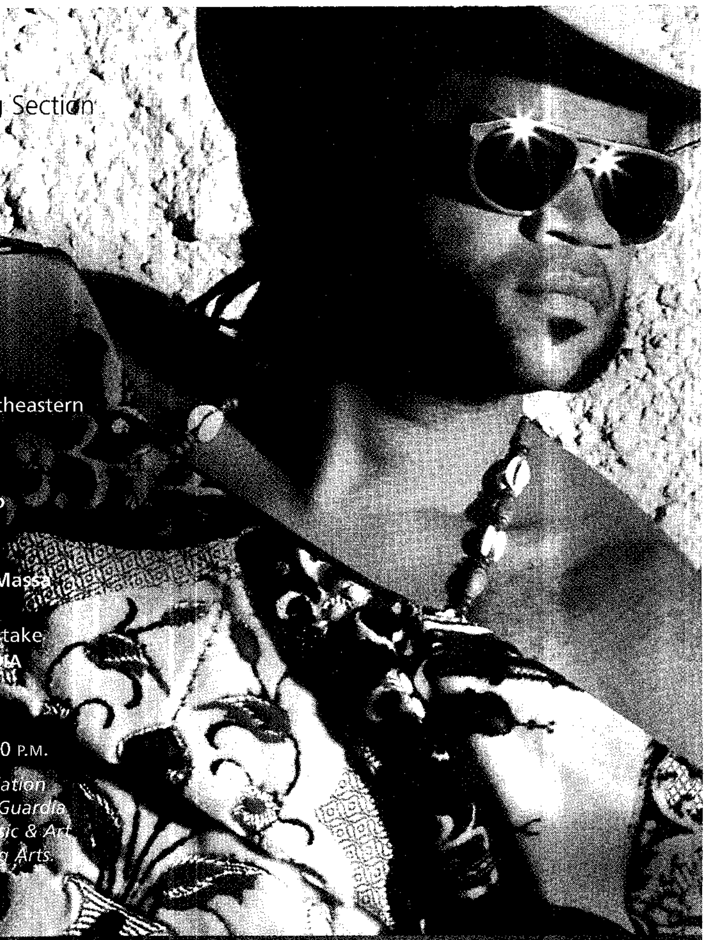
Chunhyangga
Performed by **Ahn Suk-sun**
Approx. 5 hours, 30 min.
Sun., July 20 at 3 P.M.

Percussionists **Lee Tae-baek**
Kim Chung-man

JOHN JAY COLLEGE THEATER
Tickets: $40 for each Pansori
$150 for all five Pansori

Performed in Korean with
English supertitles.

Lincoln Center Festival 2003 **www.lincolncenter.org** [illegible] 212.721.6500



Brazil: Beyond Bossa

"THE SHOOTING STAR OF POPULAR MUSIC." —*Time* magazine on Carlinhos Brown

MUSIC Discover and celebrate the popular rhythms—old and new—of the northeastern region of Brazil, the Afro-Caribbean musical heart of the country.

From Coco to Mangue Beat
Wed., July 16 at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $30

NEW YORK DEBUT
Selma do Coco
Mundo Livre S/A

The Drums of Bahia
Thurs., July 17 at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $30

U.S. DEBUT
Lactomia

NEW YORK DEBUT
Timbalada

Forró Then and Now
Fri., July 18 at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $30

U.S. DEBUT
Vanildo de Pombos
Mestre Ambrosio

A Night with Carlinhos Brown with Hip-Hop Roots
Sat., July 19 at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $35

Recife, Rabecas, and Turntables
Sun., July 20 at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $30

U.S. DEBUT
Mestre Salustiano

NEW YORK DEBUT
DJ Dolores and Orchestra Santa Massa

All performances take place in **LAGUARDIA CONCERT HALL**

Free Symposium
Fri., July 18 at 6:00 P.M.

Presented in association with Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and the Performing Arts.

Prokofiev Marathon

"A PIANIST WHO BALANCES EXCITEMENT AND SPONTANEITY WITH CLARITY AND ELEGANCE."
—*The New York Times* on Anne-Marie McDermott

MUSIC The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center offers a unique opportunity to hear all nine of Prokofiev's piano sonatas performed by pianist Anne-Marie McDermott.

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
Artistic Director **David Shifrin**

Piano **Anne-Marie McDermott**

Flute **Ransom Wilson**
Oboe **Stephen Taylor**
Clarinet **David Shifrin**
Violin **Ani Kavafian**
Violin and Viola **Ida Kavafian**
Cello **Fred Sherry**
Bass **Edgar Meyer**

Orion String Quartet
Violins **Daniel Phillips, Todd Phillips**
Viola **Steven Tenenbom**
Cello **Timothy Eddy**

ALICE TULLY HALL
Day 1: Sat., July 19
Part I at 3 P.M.
Part II at 8 P.M.

Day 2: Sat., July 26
Part I at 3 P.M.
Part II at 8 P.M.
Tickets: $45 per day general admission

Free Symposium
Sat., July 19 at 6:00 P.M.

Eislermaterial

"AN ENCHANTING AND AFFECTIONATE PORTRAIT." —*The Guardian* (London)

MUSIC Composer Heiner Goebbels and Ensemble Modern collaborate in the U.S. Premiere of *Eislermaterial*, a multimedia musical experience, which pays homage to the overlooked genius of German-Jewish composer, Hanns Eisler.

U.S. PREMIERE
Ensemble Modern

Composer and Director
Heiner Goebbels

Vocals **Josef Bierbichler**
Music **Hanns Eisler**
Text **Bertolt Brecht**
and others

Free Symposium
Sat., July 12 at 6:00 P.M.

LAGUARDIA CONCERT HALL
Sun., July 13 at 7 P.M.
Tickets: $40

Performed in German with English Supertitles.

Commissioned by musica viva, Munich. A co-production of musica viva/Bayerischer Rundfunk, Hebbel Theater Berlin and Dresden Center for Contemporary Music.

Presented in association with Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and the Performing Arts.

New York Video Festival

The Film Society of Lincoln Center continues to present the very best of multimedia and video created by cutting-edge artists in this week-long survey.

WALTER READE THEATER
Wed. July 23–Sun. July 27
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Presented in association with The Film Society of Lincoln Center.

Lincoln Center Festival 2003 offers a variety of free symposia to complement the performances. For schedule and information, please visit our Web site at **www.lincolncenter.org**.

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For more information on access, please call the Department of Programs and Services for People with Disabilities at 212.875.5375.

Programs and artists subject to change.

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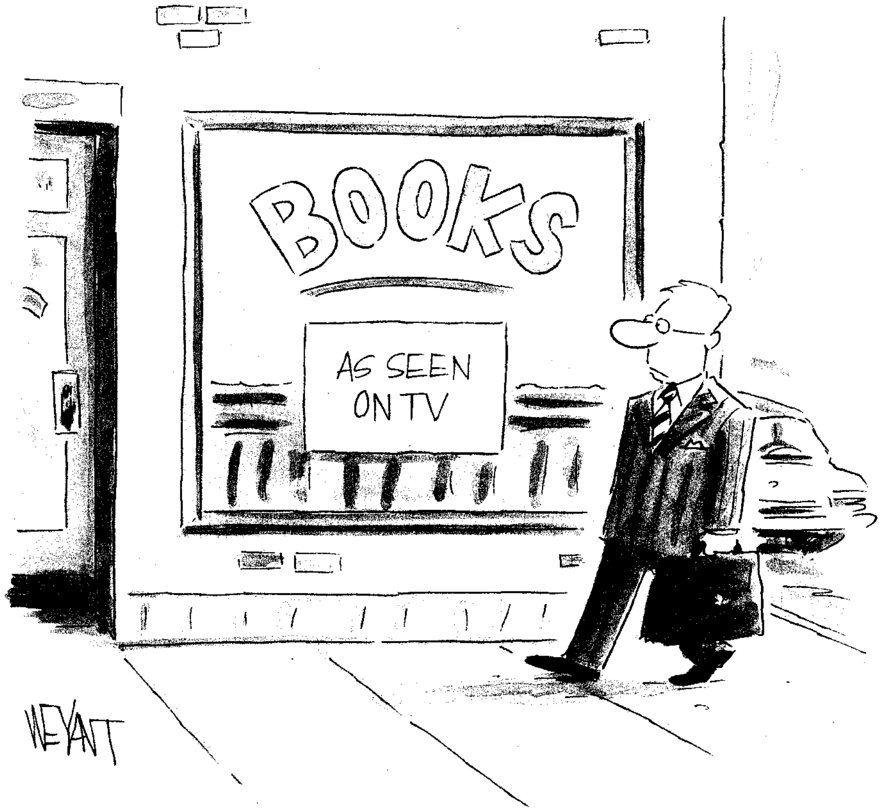


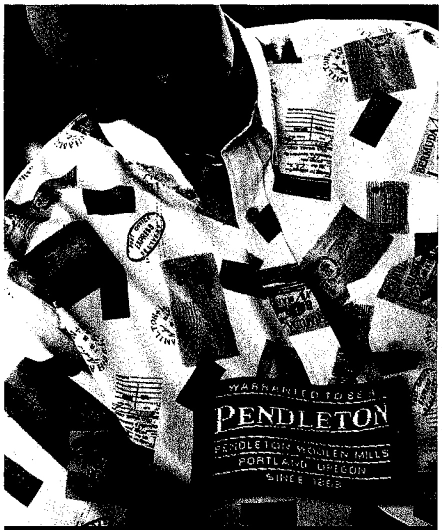
loud, right after the bell had rung and the girls had taken their places at their desks. “ ‘I’ve been dating Boy X for some months now. I like him very much. We have a steady relationship. When he touches me in certain places, it feels very good. But lately I’ve gone out with Boy Y a few times. He doesn’t read books, he has a dumb laugh and pimples.’ ”

I paused and looked out at the class. Some of the girls glanced around, trying to guess the author of the note. Others seemed genuinely interested in the problem itself. With their mouths open and their brows pulled together, they strained to digest the question and possibly apply it to their own experience. Tanya, in the first row, was chewing the tip of her pen so hard it seemed as if she might bite off a piece and swallow it. I tried not to embarrass Lara by looking at her, but out of the corner of my eye I saw that she was gazing out the window at the schoolyard, twisting and twisting her curls around her finger. I cleared my throat and read the note to the end. “ ‘I don’t like Boy Y at all. Why, then, when he touches me in certain places, do I feel exactly the same as I do with Boy X?’ ” Now they were all looking at me. They truly believed that I could answer the question.

The springs of laughter were coming back, building up somewhere in my chest and fighting to get higher and higher. And then I said something that I’d been wanting to say for a very long time:

“I don’t know!”

I enjoyed saying these words so much that it made me light-headed. I felt like hopping around the classroom singing, “I don’t know! I don’t know! I don’t know!” The laughter was getting stronger and stronger inside me. It seemed about to break through my skin, leaving my body, filling the room. Then I heard the first giggles. I wasn’t sure if it was me or one of the girls. Soon everybody was laughing, even Lara Orlova. The separate sounds became one loud, steady rumble in the room. I didn’t hear Maria Petrovna open the classroom door. I couldn’t hear what she was saying. I saw only the tips of her black shoes and her pink face squeezed between the door and the doorframe, her eyelashes blinking and her lips moving. If she was saying something about inappropriate behavior and disrespect to our young teacher, none of us could hear it. ♦



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“The *New Yorker* of the 8–13 set” -Ms.

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DÉBUT FICTION

CITY OF CLOWNS

BY DANIEL ALARCÓN

When I got to the hospital that morning, I found my mother mopping floors. My old man had died the day before and left an outstanding bill for her to deal with. They'd had her working through the night. I settled the debt with an advance the paper had given me. I told her I was sorry, and I was. Her face was swollen and red, but she wasn't crying anymore. She introduced me to a tired, sad-looking black woman. "This is Carmela," she said. "Your father's friend. Carmela was mopping with me." My mother looked me in the eye, as if I were supposed to interpret that. I did. I knew exactly who the woman was.

"Oscarcito? I haven't seen you since you were this big," Carmela said, touching the middle of her thigh. She reached for my hand, and I gave it to her reluctantly. Something in that comment bothered me, confused me. When had I ever seen her? I couldn't believe that she was standing there in front of me.

At the *velorio*, I picked out my half brothers. I counted three. For twelve years I had insulated myself from my old man's other life—since he left us, right after my fourteenth birthday. Carmela had been his lover, then his common-law wife. Petite, cocoa-colored, with blue-green eyes, she was prettier than I had imagined. She wore a simple black dress, nicer than my mother's. We didn't say much, but she smiled at me, glassy-eyed, as she and my mother took turns crying and consoling each other. No one had foreseen the illness that brought my father down.

Carmela's sons were my brothers, that much was clear. There was an air of Don Hugo in all of us: the close-set eyes, the long arms and short legs. They were a few years younger than me, the oldest maybe seventeen, the youngest about eleven. I wondered whether I should approach them, knew, in fact, that as the oldest I should. I didn't. Finally, at the insistence of our mothers, we shook hands. "Oh, the reporter," the oldest one said. He had my old man's smile. I tried to project some kind of authority over them—based on age, I guess, or the fact that they were black, or that I was the *real* son—but I don't think it worked. My heart wasn't in it. They touched my mother, with those light, careless touches that speak of a certain intimacy, as if she were a beloved aunt, not the supplanted wife. Even she belonged to them now. Being the firstborn of the real marriage meant nothing at all; these people were, in the end, Don Hugo's true family.

At the paper the next day, I didn't mention my father's death to anyone but the obituary guy, whom I asked to run a notice for me, as a favor to my mother. "Is he a relative?" he asked, his voice noncommittal.

"Friend of the family. Help me out, will you?" I handed him a scrap of paper:

> Hugo Uribe Banegas, native of Cerro de Pasco, passed into eternal life this past February 2nd at the Dos de Mayo Hospital in Lima. A good friend and husband, he is survived by Doña Marisol Lara de Uribe. May he rest in peace.

I left myself and my brothers out of it. Carmela, too. They could run their own obituary if they wanted, if they could afford it.

In Lima, those who die in phantasmagoric fashion, violently, spectacularly, are celebrated in the fifty-cent papers beneath appropriately gory headlines: "DRIVER GETS MELON BURST" or "NARCO SHOOTOUT, BYSTANDER EATS LEAD." I don't work at that kind of newspaper, but if I did I would write those headlines, too. Like my father, I never refuse work. I've covered drug busts, homicides, fires at discos and markets, traffic accidents, bombs in shopping centers. I've profiled corrupt politicians, has-been soccer players, artists who hate the world. But I've never covered the unexpected death of a middle-aged construction worker in a public hospital. Mourned by his wife. His child. His other wife. His other children.

My father's dying was not news. I knew this, and there was no reason for it to be surprising or troubling. It wasn't, in fact. At the office, I typed my articles and was not bothered by his passing. But that afternoon Villacorta sent me out to do research on clowns, for a Sunday feature on street performers that he'd assigned me a few weeks earlier. It may have been the mood I was in, but the idea of it made me sad: clowns with their absurd and artless smiles, their shabby, outlandish clothes. I'd walked only a few blocks when I felt, inexplicably, assaulted by loss. In the insistent noise of the streets, in the cackling voice of a d.j. on the radio, in the glare of the summer sun, it was as if Lima were mocking me, ignoring me, thrusting its indifference at me. A heavy woman sold wigs from a wooden cart. A tired clown rested on the curb, a cigarette between his lips, and asked me for a light. I didn't have the heart to interview him. The sun seemed to pass straight through me. My tiny family had been dissolved into another grouping, one in which I had no part.

In Lima, my father had settled on construction. He built offices, remodelled houses. He was good with a hammer, could paint and spackle, put up a wall in four hours. He was a plumber and a locksmith. A carpenter and a welder. When offered a job, he always answered in the same way. "I've done it many times," he'd reassure a contractor, while examining a tool he'd never seen before in his life. As a child, I admired him and his hard work. Progress was something you could measure in our neighborhood: how fast the second floor of your house went up, how quickly you acquired the accoutrements of middle-class life. During the week, he

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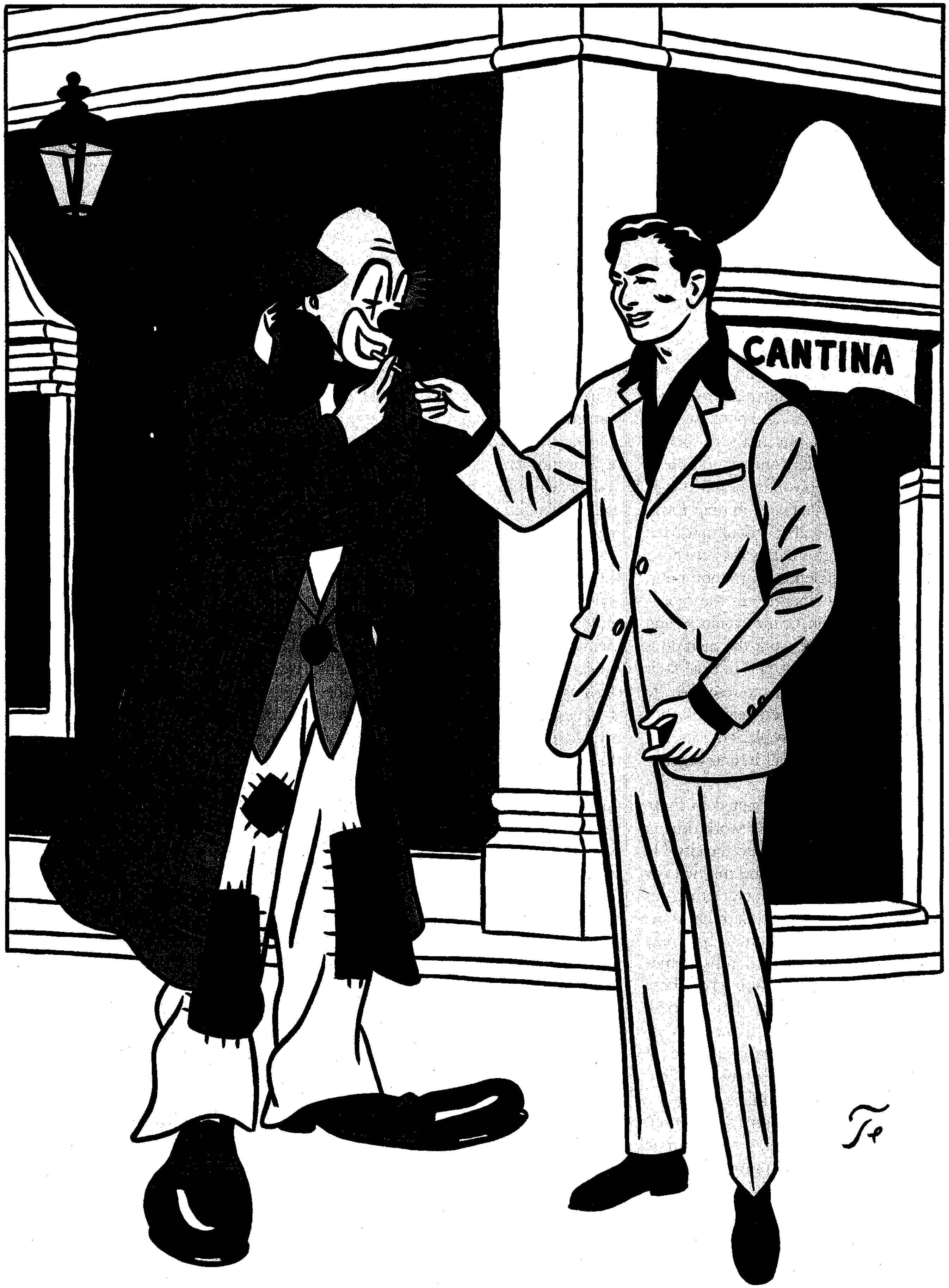


CANTINA

worked on other people's houses; on weekends, he worked on ours. Hard work paid off. We inaugurated a new stereo with a Hector Lavoe tape. We watched the '85 Copa América on a fancy color television.

It was not all that transparent, of course. My father was *vivo*, quick to understand the essential truth of Lima: if there is money to be made, it must be bled from these concrete city blocks. Some win and some lose, and there are ways to tilt the odds. He was charming, and he did good work, but he was always, always looking out for himself.

He'd been too restless to survive back home. Pasco, where he and my mother and I were born, is, oddly, neither city nor country. It is isolated and poor, high on an Andean puna, but in a very specific way it is urban: its concept of time is mechanized, and no one is spared by capitalism's ticking clock. A mining town, Pasco is not pastoral or agricultural. Men descend into the earth for ten-hour shifts. Their schedule is monotonous, uniform. They emerge—in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening—and start drinking. The work the men do is brutal and dangerous, and in time their life aboveground begins to resemble life below: they take chances, they drink, they cough and expel a tarry black mucus. *The color of money*, they call it, and buy another round of drinks.

My old man wasn't suited to those rituals. Instead, he found work driving trucks to the coast and into the city. He was twenty-nine when he married my mother, nearly a decade older than his young wife. He'd spent most of his twenties working in the city, coming back only once every three or four months. Somehow a romance had blossomed on those visits home. By the time they married, they'd been a couple for five years already, most of that time spent apart. I was born six months after the wedding. My father went on coming and going for years, making a home for himself in Lima, in the district of San Juan de Lurigancho. When my mother could no longer tolerate being left alone, he brought us there, too.

That was, I think, the only good thing he did for us. Or for me. When I remember Pasco, that cold high plain, its thin air and sinking houses, I'm grateful to be here. I grew up in Lima. I went to university here and landed a respectable job. There is no future in Pasco. Kids don't study and, anyway, are taught almost nothing. They inhale glue from brown paper bags or get drunk in the weak morning light before school.

I was eight when we moved. My father was a stranger, it seemed, even to my mother. They held hands on the bus to Lima, and I slept in her lap, even though I was too old for that. It was early January; we left Pasco iced over, the syncopated drumming of hail falling on its metal roofs. We watched the speckled orange lights fade behind us, and when I woke up it was dawn and we were pulling into the station in Lima. "There are bad people here," my old man warned us. "Be *mosca*, Chino. You're an *hombrecito* now. You have to take care of your mother."

I'd been to the city before, two years earlier, though I scarcely remembered it. My father had come home to Pasco one day and carried me off for three weeks. He'd led me through the city, pointing out the important buildings; he'd shown me the movement of the streets. I remember my mother telling me that at age six I was already more travelled than she was. Now she held my hand as the world swirled around us, and I watched my old man push his way through a thicket of men at the open door of the bus's baggage hold. They elbowed and pushed one another, the crowd swelling this way and that, and my father, who was not tall or particularly strong, disappeared into the center of it. My mother and I waited. I stared down a mustachioed man who was circling us, his greedy eyes tugging at the red woollen bag my mother had wedged between us. Then there was yelling: one man pushed another, accusing him of trying to steal his package. The accuser had a foot planted firmly on top of his box. It was taped, a name and address printed on one side.

"*Oye, compadre, que chucha quieres con mis cosas?*"

"Ah? *Perdón, tío*, my mistake."

The second man was my father. It was an accident, he protested. Packages look alike. My father's long arms were bent, palms up, a charmless shrug. But the older man was furious, his face red and his fists clenched. "*No mierda, aquí no hay errores.* Thief!" The other men pulled them apart; in the blur of it, my father grinned at me, and I realized that we'd brought only bags, no boxes.

In front of the Congress, along Avenida Abancay, a protest had spilled off the sidewalk, and traffic was stalled for five city blocks. The protesters were construction workers or telephone workers or obstetricians. Social movements, like all predators, sense weakness: the President was teetering; half his Cabinet had resigned. But on the street it still looked like Lima, beautiful, disgraced Lima, unhappy and impervious to change. I'd been to a press conference in the suburbs and was on a bus headed back to the city. The air was sticky and as thick as soup. A svelte policewoman in a beige uniform directed cars east, through the miniature streets of Barrios Altos, where cramped *quintas* fell in on each other, where kids laced up their cheap sneakers, scanning the slow-moving traffic for an opportunity. The day before, there had been robberies, entire busloads shaken down at a red light, and we were all tense, bags clutched tightly against our chests. It was the first week of carnival, and everyone from age five to fifteen (which, in Barrios Altos, is nearly everyone) was in the streets with water balloons, menacing, eager. The dilemma we faced was which way to suffer.

"*Oye, chato.* Close the window."

"*Estás loco.* It's too hot."

The tug-of-war began: between those who were willing to accept the risk of theft or pranks in order to counter the oppressive heat, and those who were not. The driver strained against his homemade seat belt. Windows opened and closed, pulled and pushed from all sides, and on the sidewalks youths salivated, hands in buckets, kneading water balloons as if they were their best friend's girlfriend's tits. Then it came from everywhere at once: from the narrows between crumbling buildings, and from the roofs as well, kids tossing overhand and underhand, unloading balloons two at a time. Water splashed through the cracked windows. The sidewalks glistened, littered with the exploded insides of red and green and white balloons. The primary target, I soon realized, was not our bus, or any bus, or, as is often the case, a young woman in a white shirt. Instead, on the sidewalk, dodging water balloons, there was a clown.

He was a vender, a travelling salesman, a poor working clown. He'd stepped off a bus and found himself in the crosshairs of a hundred children. He was struggling to get his bearings. He tucked his chin into his chest so that his multicolored wig bore the brunt of the attack, strands of pink and red sagging beneath the soaking. He had nowhere to go: a step forward, a step back, a step to the wall, a step to the curb—he danced clumsily in his big clown shoes, the balloons raining down on him. There was laughter on our bus, laughter that built community; passengers emerged from their private meditations to point and laugh and ridicule. Then the ticket collector, moved by pity, opened the door and pulled the clown in.

We fell silent. The clown dripped on the corrugated-metal floor of the bus, his white face paint running, crinkled pink hairs sticking to his cheeks. He made me want to cry, this poor clown, this pathetic specimen of *Limeño. Hermano! Causa!* The bus didn't move, and then it did. The volley of balloons receded. And, in the uncomfortable silence, dishevelled though he was, the clown went to work. He reached into an inside pocket and took out a large bag of mints. Tiny drops of water slid off the bag. "*Señores y Señoras, Damas y Caballeros*," he proclaimed. "I'm here today to offer you a new product, a product you may never have seen before. Developed with the newest and most refined technology in European mint processing. . . ."

We could hear the protest still, on the west side of the congressional building. Wooden spoons against pots, a dull metallic complaint, rhythmless, the thick voice of the people and their unfocussed rage. The clown, with his plastic clown voice, tried to sell us mints, his smile a force of will.

The newsroom swarmed with activity; a Presidential pronouncement on the economy had set everyone to work. There were rumors: some Cabinet members had fled. I didn't pay much attention. I left the office early and went to San Juan to see my mother. I took a copy of the paper to show her the obituary, a peace offering of sorts.

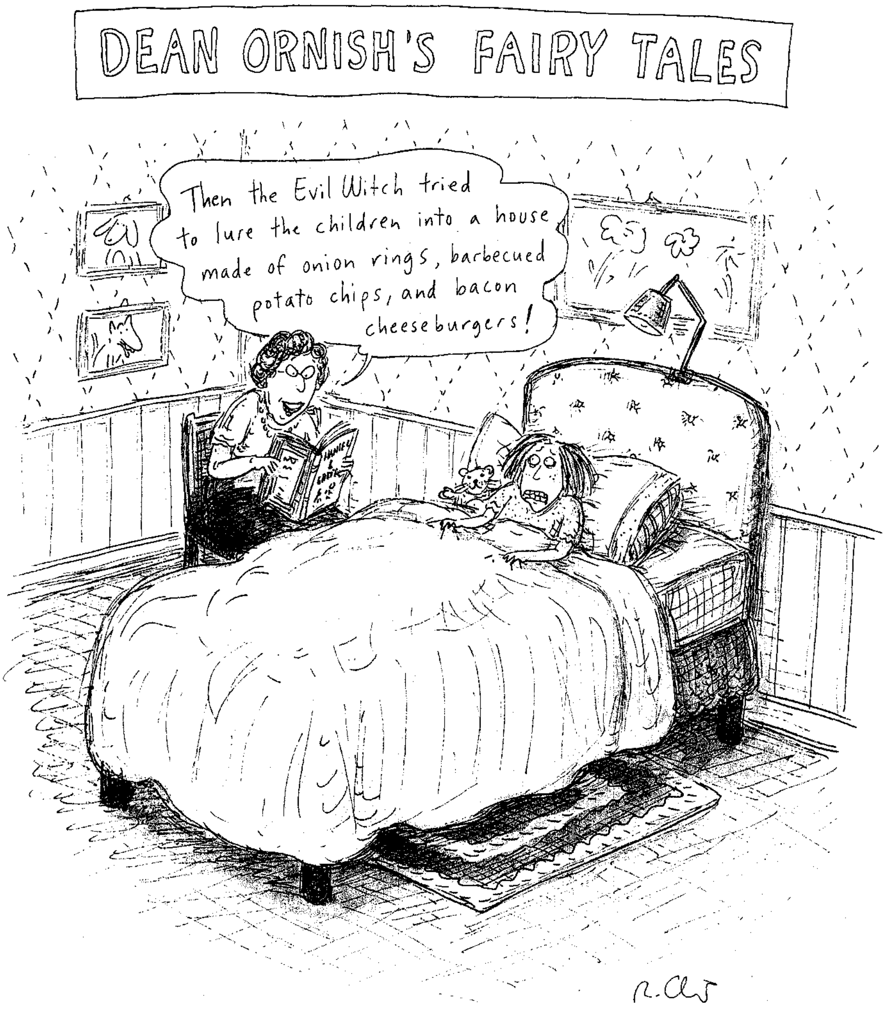
San Juan, my old street: the same crooked tree casting thin shadows in the vanishing light of dusk. I'd been living downtown for six years, but I recognized some faces. Don Segundo, from the restaurant, who had fed me for free a hundred times when we were short. Señora Nelida, from the corner, who would never give our ball back if it landed on her roof. Our old neighbor Elisa was there, too, sitting, as she always did, on a wooden stool in front of her store. One of its legs was shorter than the others. She'd repaired it with a phone book, wedged between the ground and the offending leg.

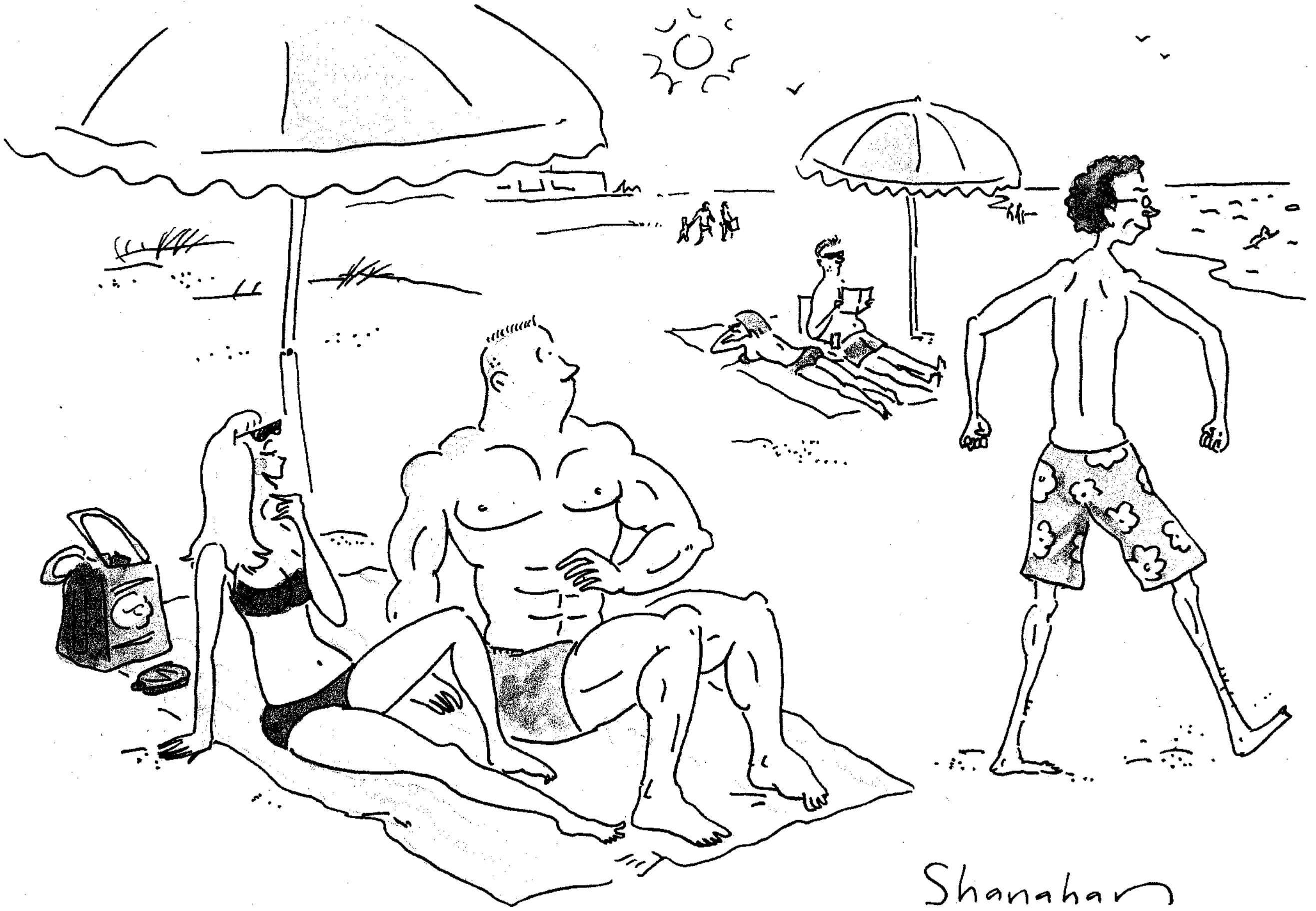
"*Vecina*," I said.

We spoke for a minute, the exchange easy and familiar. What I was doing. My work at the paper. How proud they were of me in the neighborhood when they saw my name in print. I knew this last part wasn't true, at least not among the people my age. I'd seen how my old friends looked at me: aware, perhaps, that I had once existed as a part of their world, but dismissive of every claim I had of belonging there still. We were disappearing fragments of one another's history, fading tracers against a clear night sky.

Finally, Elisa said, "Your mother's not home, Chino."

The streetlights had come on, and I noticed with some surprise that they crawled up the mountainside now. The neighborhood was still growing. New people arrived every day, as we once had, with bags and boxes and hopes, to construct a life in the city. We'd been lucky. Our new house had been small but well built. Everyone had welcomed us. Our street was overflowing with children, and within a week I'd forgotten about Pasco, about the friends I'd left there. My mother found work as a maid in San Borja, four days a week at the Azcárates', a friendly couple with a son my age. Her employers were generous, kind, and understanding to a fault, especially after Don Hugo left us. They lent us money, and helped pay for my studies when my old man abandoned that responsibility as


DEAN ORNISH'S FAIRY TALES
Then the Evil Witch tried to lure the children into a house made of onion rings, barbecued potato chips, and bacon cheeseburgers!



"His prose is so muscular."

• •

well. They never kept my mother late—so where was she?

Elisa looked at me somewhat sheepishly. "You know, Chino, she's been staying with *la negra*. With Carmela's family, in La Victoria."

"How long?"

"Since your father got sick, Chino."

Elisa motioned for me not to leave while she sold a kilo of sugar to an elderly woman in a light-green dress. I'd rolled the newspaper with the obituary into a tight baton. Now I tapped it against my thigh. I considered Elisa's news, what it meant. The scope of my mother's weakness, her astounding lack of pride. How could the arrangement work on either side, especially now, with the man who connected the two women dead? Carmela ran a dress shop, an enterprise she'd begun with my father's investment. With *my* money, probably, which should have been spent on *my* books, on *my* schooling. The business had succeeded, but was it enough, I wondered, to support the grief of two widows and three children—two of whom, at least, were still in school?

Elisa turned to me again as her customer shuffled down the street.

"Does she come here, then? Ever?" I asked.

"Your mother? Sometimes. I saw her a few days ago. I don't ask so much, you know. She's embarrassed. She's afraid of what you'll think."

"She knows exactly what I think."

Elisa sighed. "She didn't want you to know."

"Then you shouldn't have told me."

Elisa leaned back against the metal gate in front of the store. "Oscar."

"I'm sorry, *vecina*." I looked down at my feet like a misbehaving child, and stamped out the prints of my sneakers in the dusty earth. "Anyway, thank you."

"I'll tell her you came by when I see her. Or, you know, Chino, if you want you could—"

"Thank you, *vecina*."

It was late. From my old street, I used to cut across the field behind the market at any hour, fearlessly, but now it seemed an unnecessary hazard. The addicts would be out. In the firelight flicker of their ritual, I might have recognized an old friend, ashen, lost. I walked the long way out to the avenue.

I tried to picture my mother in her new home, sleeping in a guest bed or on a cot in the living room that she put away each morning. She and Carmela, sharing stories and tears, forgiving the old man in a nostalgic widows' duet. What could they have in common? Carmela was *Limeña*, a businesswoman; she knew how the city worked. My mother had been just a girl when she met my old man, barely fifteen. In Lima, he had learned to dance salsa. To drink and smoke, to fight, fuck, and steal. My mother had learned none of this. She had waited for Hugo to come home and propose. Even now, she still had her mountain accent. For years she had known only one bus line—"the big green bus," she called it—that took her to the Azcárates' home. What could Carmela and my mother share besides a battleground? My mother had capitulated. It gave me vertigo: it was the kind of humiliation only a life like hers could prepare you for.

On Saturdays, when we first moved to the city, she would take me to the Azcárates' house with her. We rode that big green bus, my mother tense, watching the streets pass in gray monotony, afraid of missing her stop. As a child and not an employee, I was able to cross certain lines. The Azcárates were permissive with me, and I never felt out of place in their home. I'd lay out my books on the table in the garden and do my homework, humming songs to myself. Sometimes their son, Sebastián, and I would wage war, setting up epic battles with swarms of plastic soldiers.

My mother liked everything about being in that house. She liked the order of it. She liked the plush of the golden-brown carpet. She even liked the books, though she couldn't read them, for the progress they represented. If I was bothering her in the kitchen, she always shooed me away: "Go grab a book, Chino. I'm busy right now."

I was sitting with her in the kitchen one day when I asked her why we had moved. In the comfort of that kitchen, I knew that *this* was better than *that*, but, the way my mother spoke of Pasco sometimes, one might picture a wide fertile valley, instead of the poor and violent town it really was. Lima frightened her. She felt safe in only two places: our house and the Azcárates' house.

"We had to move, Chino. Your father was here." She was baking a cake and she stirred the mix with a spatula. "Do you miss Pasco?"

I didn't have to think about it. "No," I said. "Do you miss it, Ma?"

"Of course," she said.

"Why?"

Her face fell. "Your grandparents are there! I grew up there! Chino, how can you ask such a thing?"

"I don't know," I said, because I didn't. She was a mystery to me, romanticizing the life we'd left behind. "It's cold there."

"If you lived away from me, wouldn't you miss me?" she asked.

"Of course, Ma."

"That's how I feel."

"Papi doesn't miss Pasco."

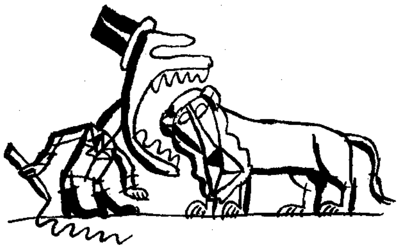
She smiled. It was true, of course. Lima was his back yard, the place where he could become what he'd always imagined himself to be. "He," she said finally, "is different. And you, Chino," she added, "you're just like your father."

I sat on the Jirón, watching Lima pass by. A pedestrian mall of roast-chicken joints and tattoo parlors, of stolen watches and burned CDs. Colonial buildings plastered over with billboards and advertisements. A din of conversations and transactions: dollars for sale; slot machines; English tapes announcing, "*Mano*"—pause, pause—"Hand." Blind musicians singing songs. Pickpockets scoping tourists. The city inhaling. A cop took a bribe in the privacy of a recessed doorway. A nun tried to pin a ribbon on me, for a donation. I dodged her with my most polite smile. Then I felt, like an electric current, the street convey a message. From the Plaza San Martín, the whole world appeared to be running toward me, and past me, toward the Plaza Mayor. Metal gates closed with clangs and crashes all along the Jirón. Businesses were shuttered with customers inside. The cop disappeared. I imagined the worst: a drunken mob of soccer fans wrecking and looting, raping and robbing. I ran to the end of the block and watched the people scatter. Then the Jirón was empty, and it was one of the strangest things I'd ever seen.

Fifteen shoeshine boys.

The children walked in rows of three, dressed in secondhand clothes, sneakers worn at the heels, donated T-shirts with American logos. Some were so young that they were dwarfed by their kits. One dragged his wooden box behind him, unconcerned as it bumped and bounced along the cobblestones. All were skinny, fragile, and smiling. As they marched toward me, they were led by a clown on stilts, twice their height, dancing elegantly around them in looping figure eights, arms extended like the flapping wings of a bird.

I watched in amazement as the protest strode past me, the children whispering their demands, the panic subsiding. Had it been a drill? A joke of some sort? Store owners and customers emerged from their bunkers, relieved and confused. Lima was playing tricks again.



I was twelve when I learned that my old man had another angle. The scheme went like this: You put in a new bathroom, or tile a kitchen, or add a third floor to a house in Surco or La Molina. You are a model worker, always polite and respectful. You don't play your music too loud. You wipe your feet and clean up after yourself. All the while, you do your real work with your eyes. Television, *check*. Stereo, *check*. Computer, *check*. Jewelry, *check*. Anything electric can be sold—kitchen appliances, even wall clocks. Nice clothes, too, especially women's. You scout for windows without locks, flimsy doors, back entrances. You keep track of schedules: When the husband is at work, when the wife is at the salon. When the kids come home from school. When the maid is there alone.

My father and his crew were smart. They could wait a few months or as long as a year. Sometimes the neighborhood security guard was in on it, too; for a small fee, he'd tell them when a family was out of town. Other times, the maid got the worst of it: the fright, and often the blame.

I remember one evening at our house. They were planning, or, perhaps, celebrating. There were six of them, and I knew some so well that I called them *tío*. They came around a lot, to drink with my old man, to play soccer on Sundays. And they sat close together, talking in low voices, bubbling now and then into laughter. I was called to bring more beer from the fridge. I passed a cold bottle to my father, who took it without looking, intent on what his partner, Felipe, was saying. I listened, too. "I always try to smack the maid real good," Felipe said proudly. "And I try to break something—just so the family doesn't think she was in on it." Everyone cheered this perverse generosity. My father, too. Standing at the edge of the circle of men, I thought of my own mother falling to the floor.

Villacorta was asking for his article. I was avoiding him. The government had not fallen, and the protests continued. A group of unemployed textile workers burned tires and looted in El

Agustino. There was talk of the President not returning from his next state trip. I was counting on the story to snowball, to crowd my clown feature out of the news section the following Sunday. An extra week would help.

I worked and slept and worked, and thought as little as possible about my old man, my mother, Carmela. I thought about clowns. They had become, to my surprise, a kind of refuge. Once I'd started looking for them, I found them everywhere. They organized the city for me: buses, street corners, plazas. They suited my mood. Appropriating the absurd, embracing shame, they transformed it. *Laugh at me. Humiliate me. And, when you do, I've won.* Lima was, in fact and in spirit, a city of clowns.

The February heat smothered the city, even after dark, and in the evenings I rarely made it farther than the bar downstairs. The overhead fans whirled, stirring the warmth. I listened to the hum of a dozen separate conversations, to the clink of glasses, to cheerful applause in the back room. It made me feel less alone.

One night, a clown stood at the counter next to me. I recognized him. He worked mornings in front of San Francisco, for the children who went there on school trips. I knew the red-and-orange plaid of his suit. Usually he had a partner, but he was alone now, tired, halfway out of costume, headed for home. Like me, he probably wanted a drink to help him sleep. I should have let him go on his way, but before I realized it I'd blurted out, "You're a clown."

He turned, puzzled, and looked me in the eye. "You asking me or telling me, *causa*?"

"Asking, friend."

"And who the fuck are you?" His frown was very unclownlike, the kind of look that would frighten a child. There was white greasepaint ground into the wrinkles at the edges of his mouth.

"Oscar Uribe," I said. "I write for *El Clarín*."

"The newspaper?" He turned away, back to the business of ordering a drink. I pulled out two chairs at a table by the bar and moved my bottle of red wine.

"*Maestro!*" I called to the waiter. "Another glass, please!" The waiter acknowledged me with a wave. I looked back at the clown, motioning to the empty chair. He shrugged and sat down.

His name was Tonio, he said, and he didn't have all night.

But I kept the wine coming. I found myself telling him about my mother, about my old man. About Pasco and San Juan. He listened and drank. Then he told me about his home town, in the north, about arriving in Lima penniless. He said that he'd lived under the Santa Rosa Bridge for a time. And clowning? "It's work, brother. Better than some, worse than others," he said. "I'm not good at much else. It's either this or stealing."

"Amen," I said.

He told me how good it felt to be someone else for a living, to be out in the streets on a clear day. He said that the children had sweet faces and it touched him to see them happy. He complained about having to compete with every unemployed nobody selling candy on the buses.

"Does it pay the bills?"

"I don't need much," he said, nodding. "No wife. No kids."

"How did you settle on this line of work?"

He smiled then, so unexpectedly that I thought he'd misunderstood me. It was a wonderful smile, a real clown smile. With his thumb, he rubbed at the paint still hiding in the creases of his face. "No, *causa*," he said, shaking his head. "It's like this: You wake up one morning, and *boom!* You're a clown."

Señor Ingeniero Hubert Azcárate opened the door. He shook my father's hand, patted me on the head, and waved us both in. I wiped my feet three times, back and forth against the thick doormat. I'd been there many more times than my father had. He was watching my every move. There were three stairs, and at the bottom of the landing the room opened up into a wide, airy space full of light. An L-shaped sofa and a leather armchair were positioned around a wooden coffee table. Built-in shelves along the walls held hundreds of books. The windows opened onto a garden terrace with trees and grass and flowers sprouting in warm colors.

"Mari!" Señor Azcárate called out. "Your husband is here, with Chino!"

My mother appeared from the kitchen, a little shocked to see us. Her maid's uniform was a pristine white. She kissed us both, and then asked, concerned, "What are you doing here?"

Señor Azcárate had already made his way to his comfortable leather chair, and he sat now, observing us with an air of patrician benevolence. "Oh, don't worry, Mari," he said. "Your husband only wanted to speak with me. It's no problem at all."

"Go on back to the kitchen," my father said. "We'll come say goodbye before we leave."

My father sat down. He began by recounting the reasons that we were grateful to Señor and the Azcárate family. The generosity, the solidarity, the understanding. "Things haven't always been easy, but I tell Mari, I tell her every day, God was smiling on us the day she got this job."

I had never heard my father invoke God for any reason other than to explain the weather.

Señor Azcárate nodded, *yes, yes, yes*, savoring my father's gratitude. He was a thin man whose pale-blue eyes had become even more prominent as his hair receded. He often squinted when he spoke, as if we were drifting away and he might lose sight of us. "Please, please, Hugo. Go on."

"Señor Ingeniero, at Chino's new school," my father continued, "everyone will have money." I was about to start at a private school in San Isidro, where the Azcárates had arranged a scholarship.

"Are you worried about the tuition?" Señor Azcárate asked. "I explained to Mari that everything is covered except the uniforms."

"No, no, it's not that." My old man searched for the right words. "You know, Señor Ingeniero, I'm a builder. I work almost every day—I should say, every day that I can." He put his arm around me. "We're so proud of Chino. I always knew that he was a smart one. But, you know, we struggle to pay for this, to pay for that. There isn't always work, that's the thing. . . . I'm embarrassed to even ask, after all you've done for us."

"No, no, ask, Hugo, please." Señor Azcárate leaned toward my father. My father's silence was studied. "How long has Marisol worked with us?" Azcárate asked. "I'll tell you: long enough that she's family." He smiled, then turned to me, speaking as if to a child of five. "You're family, Chino, you know that? Your father, he's family, too."

I nodded, perplexed. Finally, my old

man spoke, and this time he went straight to the point. "I was hoping, if it's possible, if anyone from Chino's new school would be doing work on their house . . ."

"I really couldn't say."

"No, but, if they were, could you put in a word for me? For my business?"

It was Don Hubert Azcárate's favorite kind of favor, the kind he could fulfill. The kind that confirmed his own charity. He was a nice man, he really was. He promised that he would. My father smiled happily. "Thank Señor Azcárate, Chino," he told me. I shook the engineer's veiny hand. Then the two men embraced. "You don't know what this means to me," my old man said.

All my life, I've been Chino. In Pasco, in Lima. At home, in my neighborhood. The way some people are Chato or Cholo or Negro. I hear those two syllables and look up. There are thousands of us, of course, perhaps hundreds of thousands, here and everywhere that Spanish is spoken. No nickname could be less original. There are soccer players and singers known as Chino. One of our crooked Presidents lived and died by his moniker: *chino de mierda.* Still, it is my name, and always was my name. Until I started at Peruano Británico, that is. There, I was called Piraña.

Piranhas were already a phenomenon in Lima by the time I started high school. The authorities had ordered investigations and organized police sweeps. There were news reports and shocking images. A city on the brink. In packs of fifteen or twenty, they would swarm a car and swiftly, ruthlessly undress it. Hubcaps, mirrors, lights. The crawling commute held the prey in place—the owner of the car, helpless, honking his horn frantically, aware perhaps that the wisest thing was to do nothing at all. To wait for them to pass. But that was an option only for a while. More audacious crews started breaking windows, taking briefcases, cell phones, watches, sunglasses, radios. *Full service,* people joked darkly. A new kind of crime, sociologists called it. And an astute observer—of the kind who traffic in phrases—named them piranhas.

At morning roll call in the courtyard of my new school, my class lined up in single file. I found my place in the order of last names, Uribe, almost at the back. Ugaz in front of me. Ventosilla behind me. My uniform was neat and pressed, and I looked, from a distance, just like all the others. The teacher called us off, and one by one we marched to our new classroom. It wasn't until recess that afternoon that my classmates sought me out. "*Oye*, you play?" The kid held a soccer ball in his hands. He kicked it to me. I passed it back, making sure I used good form. I introduced myself as Oscar or Chino. "César," he answered. We formed a team. We grabbed a kid with glasses and put him in goal. We played. We scored and were scored on. We yelled and sweated and cursed and then, when I took the ball from a kid on the other team, he called a foul, dropped to the ground, and held his ankle, grimacing. In San Juan, I would have called him a pussy, and that would've been that. But he yelled, "*Oye! Oye!*" and we stopped. "That's a foul here, *huevón*," he said, frowning. "Where the hell are you from?"

I didn't have to respond, but I did. I could have said any place in the city, but I didn't. "San Juan de Lurigancho," I answered.

Of course, eventually they would have found out where I was from. They would have seen me walking to the Avenida Arequipa to catch the bus home. They would have known that I didn't live in La Molina or Surco. But perhaps if they hadn't learned this detail on the very first day, if they had known me better, they wouldn't have associated me with the criminal reputation of my district.

"San Juan?" he said, breaking into a cruel smile. "Ooooohh . . . *Habla piraña!*"

I met Tonio at eight-thirty the next morning in front of San Francisco. He was already painted and dressed. I was still shaking off sleep and a red-wine headache. He introduced me to his partner, a yellow-faced clown named Jhon.

"You're the reporter?" Jhon asked suspiciously.

"Be nice," Tonio said.

He pulled an oversized polka-dot suit from his backpack. It was white with green dots. It fit me like a garbage bag. Tonio declared it perfect. Jhon agreed. A pair of green shoes was next; I wiggled my feet into them. They were twice the length of my forearm. Then Tonio handed me a mirror and three plastic cannisters of face paint, each the size of a roll of film. "You take care of that," he said, holding out a thin brush.

I felt outside of myself; the details of the previous night's conversation were so

"Ballroom dancing helps us over our rough spots."

• •

hazy and wine-soaked that I couldn't recall exactly how I had ended up there or what commitments I had made. In the mirror, I watched myself transform. I put red circles on my cheeks. Jhon passed me a nose. It was an oversized red Ping-Pong ball cut in half and threaded by a rubber band. Finally, Tonio pulled a worn jester's hat from the bottom of his bag, the colors faded, the pointy edges falling limply in my face. It would have to do.

Walking through the city, one-third of a trio of clowns, I was surprised to find how relaxed I was, and how invisible. You'd think the world's gazes would have converged upon us, on our loud costumes and painted smiles, but most people simply ignored us, walked past without a glance; only the children smiled and pointed, sometimes waved. Jhon and Tonio chatted about soccer; I watched and listened in a daydream.

We let a few buses pass because they were too empty. "It's bad luck at the beginning of the day," Tonio explained. Finally, he nodded as a more crowded bus approached. We pushed past the ticket collector and were instantly onstage, all eyes on us. "*Señores y Señoras, Damas y Caballeros!*" We stood in a row, Tonio in the center, yelling over the asthmatic rattle of the engine. "I am not here asking for charity! In fact, I am a rich man! This is my bus! This is my driver! And *this*," Tonio bellowed, pointing to the ticket collector, hanging halfway out the door of the bus, calling the route, "*this* is my mascot!"

Jhon was the chorus, echoing every pronouncement Tonio made, in the stereotypical voice of a drunk lifted from a Rubén Blades song. He pretended to fall, and Tonio made sheepish apologies for his drunken partner, who had spent the night before "celebrating the purchase of a new three-story home in San Borja!"

I felt useless. I flashed my dumb clown smile and tapped my fingers against my chest. I could feel my face paint drying to an uncomfortable film, affixing an unnatural contortion to the muscles of my face. I was dazed, almost seasick, as the bus sped along the avenue. Tonio was wrapping up. "My humble servant—God bless the poor deaf-mute—will be passing by your seats now to collect your fare." He bowed low, and then nodded at me.

We weren't selling anything; this was a bold conceit that Tonio had devised to cut costs. It was *our* bus; I simply passed down the aisle collecting everyone's fare. "*Pasajes, pasajes a la mano*," I murmured, just as a ticket collector would. Some passengers, napping, barely opening their eyes, handed me a coin without thinking. Some dropped loose change in my hand; some even thanked me. Most ignored me, looking away, even men and women who had watched the act and smiled.

I collected a total of 4.20 *soles*. The bus stopped. "Ladies and gentlemen, good day!" Tonio shouted. We stepped off into the morning sun. The whole thing had taken five minutes.

"And lastly, for all eternity, French, blue cheese, or ranch?"

I put a coin in the slot and dialled the number for Elisa's bodega. It was early afternoon. Tonio and Jhon sat in a café across the street, sharing a cup of tea. We were back downtown, taking a break. We'd been thrown off buses, had change tossed at us, been spat at. But we'd made money. A good day, Tonio assured me, better than usual. They seemed content.

The phone rang and rang in San Juan, and then she answered. She asked me how I was.

I looked at the busy street, the people meandering homeward or workward, lost in their own lives. "I'm at the office, *vecina*. I can't talk long." I asked her if she'd seen my mother.

"At the funeral, Chino. Why weren't you there?"

"I had to work. I couldn't make it. Did she say anything?"

"She misses you, Chino." I heard Elisa sigh. "She said that everything is good with Carmela. That she might sell the house."

I didn't say anything.

"Chino, are you there?"

"I'm here."

"Are you going to visit her?"

Tonio and Jhon were paying with change, haggling for a little extra hot water. They counted the money out in ten-cent coins. The waitress tried to hold back a smile. Jhon leaned over the counter and blew her a kiss. They were charming clowns. "Thank you, *vecina*," I said, and hung up the phone.

My new nickname both labelled me as dangerous and emasculated me. I was never scary to them. I was a joke. A nerdy kid from the ghetto. I was too skinny. Too weak. Even when I played well or ran fast, they hurled insults at me. In San Juan, we'd joked about how I would beat up these *pitucos*, but the reality was different. They wielded their power carelessly, sometimes unconsciously. They could cut me out with a comment or simply with silence.

"It's time for you to start working," my father announced.

It was my second year at Peruano Británico. I was almost fourteen. In more than a year, I'd never been invited to a classmate's home. Each day, I rode the bus from San Juan to San Isidro in silence.

I'd given my father's line of work a lot of thought. I'd examined it under the rule of ethics and law. It was wrong. Certainly. But when he told me it was time for me to work my mind gathered a year of scattered insults and wove them together. I savored those injuries, imagined what a delight it would be to go through one of those boys' houses, to exchange smiles and handshakes. To work there, and then to *steal*. I began to understand my old man, or to think I did. But I wanted to be sure.

"I want to work," I said.

"Of course you do. Every man wants to work."

"Pa, are we going to break into this house?"

He sat back. Frowned. He'd misread me. "Have people been saying things?"

I nodded.

"And what do you think about what they say?" He seemed poised to smile at the slightest hint of approval.

"I believe them."

"Well, Chino," he said, and stopped.

I wanted to take it back. To add to it: *I believe what they say, but it's all right with me.* I wanted to tell him that those rich fucks could complain to God if they didn't like it. That they could move to Miami and become American. That, if they wanted to call me Piraña, then they'd better be good and fucking ready when I came in and repossessed all their treasures.

He ran a finger through his hair and winked. His large black eyes were set close, his mouth was small, comically so, but his broad smile evened everything out, organized the jumble of his features. He kept his black hair meticulously combed back. At rest, he was a caricature of an Indian. In laughter, he was a mestizo Clark Gable. So he laughed and smiled and made that smile the linchpin of his personality. Now he met my gaze, his son—I believed, his only son. "Chino, we're just men who work. You and I both. Crazy things happen in the city." He snapped his fingers and laughed. He hugged me. "O.K.?"

The wife had a good eye for color. She had decorated the house herself, she told us. She walked us through the expansive suburban mansion—my father, Felipe, and me—pointing out renovations and design touches: a wall they'd knocked down, leaving only painted beams. "See how this adds space to the room? Gives it another feel?" she asked. The three of us nodded, our eyes wide and observant. There were skylights, balconies, a garden with blossoming trees, but we focussed on what could be taken away: a computer, a stereo, even a dishwasher. The husband was an executive at a bank, an old friend of Señor Azcárate's. They wanted to remodel the second floor, to add a television room, she said. It wouldn't be a lot of work, maybe three or four weeks. Some painting. New carpet. A couple of new windows and light fixtures.

I worked on Saturdays, and I saw my father more on those days than I ever had at home. During the week, he was mostly gone. His youngest son was still in diapers, and my mother must have known about Carmela by then. When he was home they argued, but I didn't know why. The construction on our own house had stalled, the second floor still open air, a thick plastic sheet tied at the corners of three walls. When they were fighting, I retreated there and watched the ridges of the hills draw lines against the sky.

The family we were working for had a son, Andrés, who was in the class above me at Peruano Británico. At his house, he ignored me. At school, he let it be known that I had crossed the line. I felt the stares, the judgment. By the time he woke up on Saturdays, I had already been working for three or four hours. His weekends, as far as I could tell, took the shape of an extended yawn. I placed tiles in the hallway. He ate cereal. I sanded down corners and measured for bookshelves. He spoke on the phone, loud enough for me to hear. "Yeah, Piraña's here. You bet I'm watching my shit, *huevón*." He made no attempt to hide his disdain for me. I listened to him speculate as to which girl would be the first to let him seduce her in the new room we were building. How far she would spread her legs. With a long phone cord dragging behind him, he paraded through the work area, complained of the dust, asked his mother to tell us that the sanding was hurting his ears. He put on a show of power. I bowed my head at the appropriate times and pretended not to hear.

One Saturday, when we were almost done, the entire family was getting ready for a wedding. The mother flitted about, changing her dress three times. The father came in to tell us that we'd have to leave a little early because they all had to go. We were hurrying our work along, trying to finish, when Andrés called out to his mother, "Mami, tell Piraña to stop with the hammering! I can't even think!"

He stepped out into the hallway, wearing a gray wool suit and a red tie, still unknotted. He glared at me.

"What did you call him, Andrés?" his mother said sharply, coming into the room. Her hair was styled in a hard, gelled bob. She stood in front of him, waiting for him to speak.

"Piraña," Andrés muttered.

"What?" she said, surprised, embarrassed. "Why would you call him that?" She turned to me. "Son, what's your name?"

"Oscar, Señora."

"Your mother works with the Azcárates, doesn't she?"

I felt myself turning red. "Yes, Señora."

"And what year are you in?"

"Third, Señora."

Andrés watched this exchange with practiced condescension. In his elegant suit he was transformed, ready to be photographed for Lima's society pages. He was taller than me, and more handsome, bathed at that moment in superiority, profound and harsh. I wore my work clothes, worn at the knees and splattered with paint.

"Andrés," his mother said, "this is Oscar. This young man is a student at your school. He is friends with Sebastián Azcárate. Now shake his hand and introduce yourself like a gentleman."

His eyes steeled, and his hand, too. He held it out.

"Andrés," he said.

"Oscar."

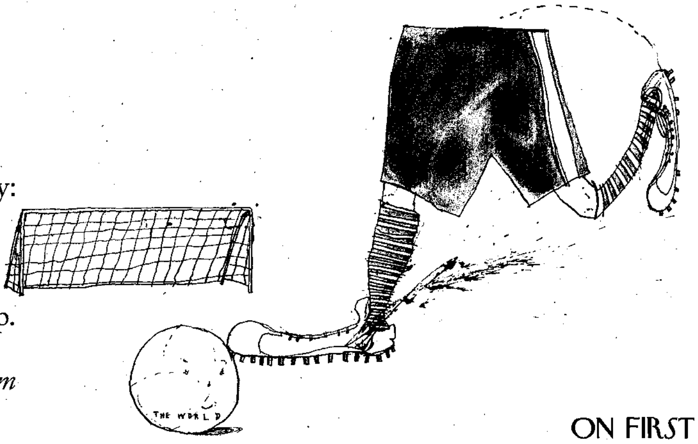
We shook. *No, you were right*, I thought. *Piraña concha tu madre. That's my fucking name.* I glared at him and held his hand,

THE DARIEN CONNECTICUT DEF POETRY JAM • BY ROGER ANGELL

2 HAIKU

Kick him in the groin
And get that yellow, baby:
Mom's late for yoga.

Bo's header in net
Beats Mamaroneck 1–zip.
Early admission?
—*Sokkamom*



SITTER

Changin yo Huggies
Baby honkee muhfuh
So don do me no trix
Got a Calculus I test
Tomorrow second period
And if I turn Tupac way low
You go'n sleep
Sweetie babe?
—*LASOUL*

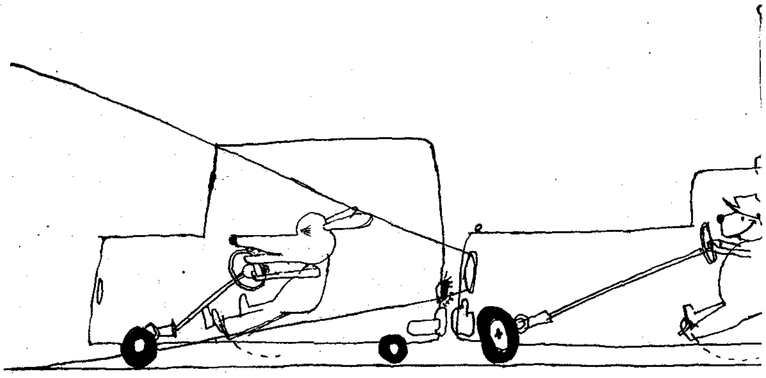
ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S SECOND DRAWER

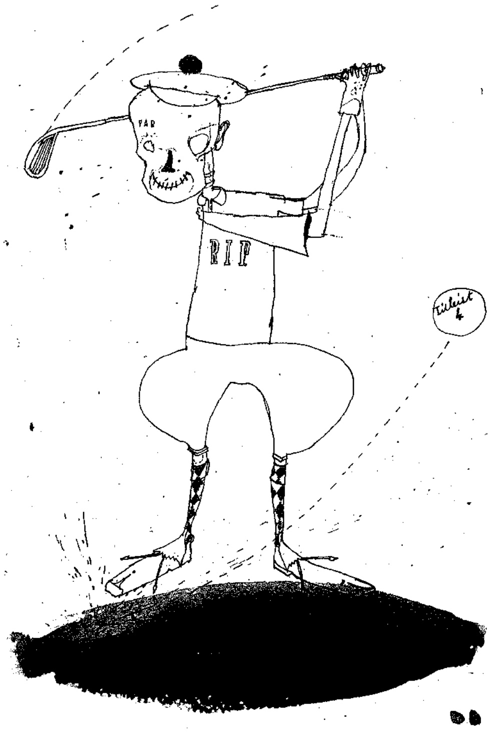
I hear you Vanessa and Aly:
French cuffs are so
McOut.
—*M. Moi*

RPM

ogetoffmyassgetoffmyassgetoffmyassmisterbigfatlexus
high on latte here on the dewy do we merritt
i'm askin'—you wanna play games?
you wanna play bumperpool?
You wanna play the lil game i taught
my poodle name of renoir: rollover and play dead?
looks like it. . . .
rumrum rummedyrum.
uhohwasthatyouflashingyourhighbeamatmejustnow?

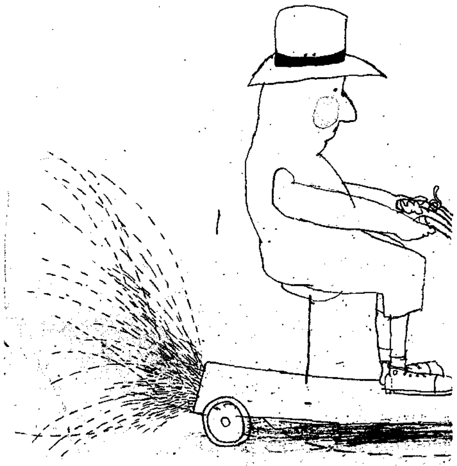
—*Walter Putnam Stebbins*

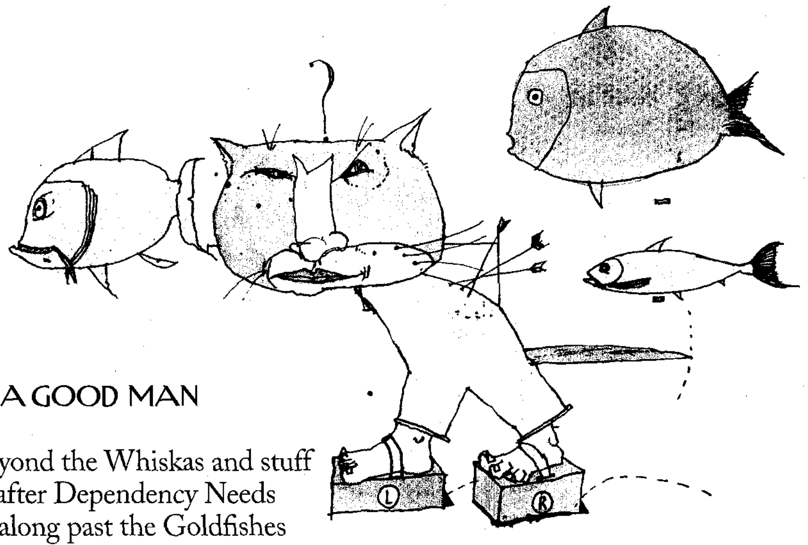




INTIMATION AT WEE SPINNEY

My Title-
Ist from a boggy
Lie sailed O sunlit
Orb slightly trapward
Ere my deft in
Sideout 6-iron
Draw
Plunked it just on the second
Cut at 17 from
Where it rolled
Sweet slight bend
Yow exclam cried Herb
To within 2' 8" but
What's left for me
Now eye ask?
—*Biff III*

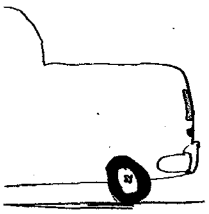




A GOOD MAN

Right beyond the Whiskas and stuff
2nd left after Dependency Needs
Straight along past the Goldfishes
Balsamics Baking Supplies Batteries Bottled Waters
Now left again before Party & Poolside
+ look w. care thru Other Herbs (Rt. Side) and if not
ASK!
But what the hell is
—can't make out your writing—
"Filé Powder?"

—*Yupster*



12:31 A.M.

You 'wake?
Listen what came between the Accord hatchback
And the yellow Volvo DL wagon? Sort of
Gray with a little ding
Low on the door on your side?
Funny to ask when I'm looking at my dad's
Malibu here plain as day.

—*Ambien*

GREEN AS GREEN

We are crabgrass. Up up up up up up up
Grow grow grow grow grow—
HOLD IT! QUIET GUYS!
mnmnmnmnmnmnmnmnn
Yep, it's Rider-man. Heads down, everybody:
. . . *mnmnm MNMNMNMNMNmnmm mn m n* . . .
There he goes—did you catch that *hat*?
Well, back to the old salt mines, I guess.
Grow grow grow grow up up up up up
Their Shih Tzu died

—*S. Ward*

perhaps a moment too long. I squeezed.

"That's enough, boys," his mother said, and they both turned to leave.

"Good afternoon, Señora," I called.

We played to passengers in Santa Anita, Villa Maria, and El Agustino. We rode through Comas, Los Olivos, and Carabayllo. Three days. Lima on display, in all her grandeur, the systems of the city becoming clear to me: her cells, her arteries, her multiple beating hearts. We collected laughs and coins until the money weighed heavy in my suit pocket. I was a secret agent. I saw six people I knew: among them, an ex-girlfriend, two old neighbors from San Juan, and a woman from the university. Even a colleague from the paper. Exactly zero recognized me. I was forgetting myself, too, patrolling the city, spying on my own life. I had never felt this way: on display, but protected from the intruding eyes of strangers and intimates.

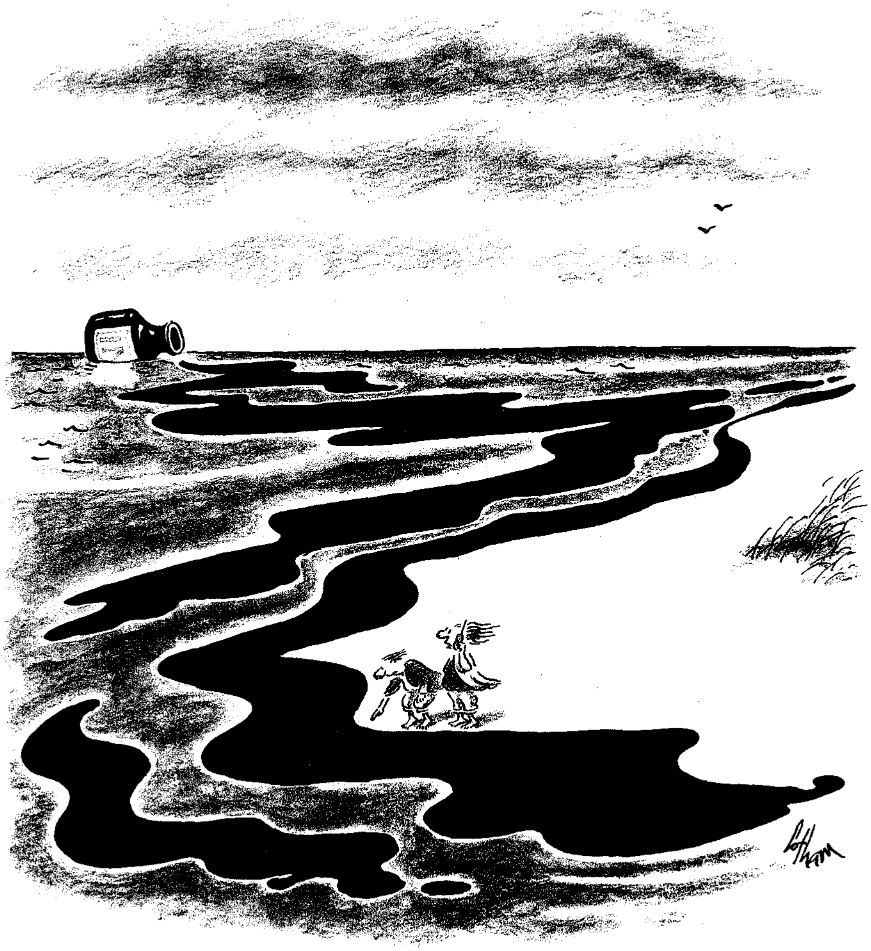
I watched the ex-girlfriend chew the nail of her pinkie. When we were together, she'd seemed to me the type who would flower, grow into herself, become more attractive each year. But she was twenty-seven now and still not beautiful. I looked her in the eye as she handed me a coin, felt a shock when her finger grazed my open palm. She had no idea who I was.

My old man had paid off the security guard. He'd given us a time and a day. The whole family was out of town. I'd been waiting six months for this. I was a good student and they hated me. I was a good soccer player and they mocked me. I didn't understand a thing about them, or why they were the way they were.

We rode in Felipe's windowless van. They tossed me over the wall. I opened the garage and they backed the van in. The rest was easy. The television, the VCR, the computer, the stereo—each was carried out and packed carefully into the van. We moved nimbly through the dark house, carrying the wares as if they were works of art. And they were. A sleek cordless phone meant thirty *soles*. A blender, fifteen, if you knew where to sell it. It was so ordered and efficient, it didn't seem like stealing at all.

My father told me once that in Lima anything can be bought and sold. We were walking through the market in San Juan, past the fruit stalls, flies buzzing around the meat and fish. A woman sold clothes piled in high, disordered

DAVID HUGHES



"There's been a massive ink spill!"

mounds. Fake Barcelona jerseys. Stolen car parts and bags and watches. An old man stood by his cart of hardware: hammers, pliers, and nails, bent, rusty, unmistakably used. My old man found it pathetic. "Used nails!" he cried out. "For the love of God, are we this poor?"

I did a last run through the house. We were almost done. It was my first time out, my old man's way of saying he trusted me. I wanted in because I trusted him. We were going to be O.K. I knew it. We would have money again. We would finish the second story of our house, and my mother would be happy again. They would both be happy. I had no idea that he was preparing to leave us.

I lingered at the top of the stairs, looking at the room we'd built. It was really something, even with the gaping hole where the television had been. I was proud of my work. A few steps down the hall, along the tiles I'd laid myself, was Andrés's room. I wasn't looking for anything in particular. We'd already taken his boom box and alarm clock. I turned on the lamp. In the closet, there were half a dozen pairs of shoes and button-down shirts in white and blue. I touched them all. I ran my fingers along the rack and found it: his gray wool suit. I'd just pulled it from the closet when my father walked in.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he hissed. "Turn that goddam light off!"

"I'm sorry," I said. We were in darkness again.

"We're leaving. Put that back," he said. "We can't sell that."

"We could."

"We're in a hurry, Chino. Let's go."

"It's for me," I said.

"This isn't a department store. You don't need it."

He was right. I didn't need it, wouldn't need it. Not until I wore it for my interview at *El Clarín*, seven years later. I knew it would take me a year or two to grow into it, if I grew into it at all. It was a dull, shapeless longing, but it was real. "I want this," I said, "for my birthday."

I could barely see him in the purple shadows.

"Your birthday?" my father said. He'd forgotten. His voice softened. "Well, then, take it."

I rode around the city in my green-and-white suit and thought about my mother. I put my article in an envelope, sealed it, and dropped it in the mail. I didn't see Villacorta, or check the paper to see if he'd published it. I broke away from Tonio and Jhon, paid them twenty *soles* for the suit and the shoes and the memories. I thanked them from the very bottom of my new clown heart. And I didn't do their act, or any act. I spent my savings. I put on the polka-dot suit and stepped into the unwieldy shoes. I painted my face in the dim reflection of the hallway mirror. I placed the red Ping-Pong ball over my nose, felt the tight pull of the rubber band against my hair. And I rode the buses, paying my fare like any other passenger, except that I was unlike any other passenger. I knew that I would see her. This was our city, hers and mine.

I rode to La Victoria, where the corner kids eyed me, wondering if it was worth their trouble to mug a clown. I walked the narrow streets, my shoes flopping on the crumbling sidewalks. I sat on a bench in front of Carmela's house and waited. My black brothers came and went to their schools, to their jobs. They didn't even shoot me a glance. I was part of the architecture. A cop stopped and asked if I was all right.

"Just resting, chief," I said.

Was I from around here?

"I'm Don Hugo's kid."

"Carmela's Hugo?" he asked. Then he left me alone.

Carmela came home, carrying dresses, and smiled at me because she smiled at everyone. Her door swung open wide, and from my bench I peered into her world, my mother's new world. And then things came at me in waves: the street, the house. *I haven't seen you since you were this big*, Carmela had said at the hospital. I remembered. When I was six, Don Hugo had taken me to see his mistress. I'd never seen a black person before. I cried and said she looked burnt. He hit me and told me to be nice to my *tía*. She grinned and pinched my cheek. Now I couldn't bring myself to ring the doorbell. I knew that she'd be kind, even with me dressed this way. As kind as she was to my mother. She'd answer my questions and tell me how she met my father, how she fell for him, the sweet things he'd told her. Carmela and my mother must have spoken of all this already. What revelations did I have for them, anyway? They had worked out the details of their parallel heartbreaks: who had him when, who had him first, who was innocent, who was guilty. And they'd forgiven him, and that was the most astounding thing of all.

Why were you always forgiving him, Ma? He told *her* everything first—about you, about me, about the work he did and planned to do. He let you swim in darkness, and wonder at the vacant spaces, and ask yourself what mistakes you'd made. And then he left us. And you forgave him, Ma. You forgave him.

After we broke into Andrés's house, the loot was split, but my mother and I saw none of it, except the gray wool suit. The next week, I found myself on my knees again, burnishing the lacquered floorboards of another house. Another Saturday, and then another. I went on three jobs with my father and his crew. I understand now that money must have been tight. He had four sons to support. We'd just finished a two-week job when Felipe came by with the van. I remember thinking it was strange that they hadn't given the place time to cool. I thought I understood the hustle. I asked my father about it.

"Shut up," he said. "Don't ask questions."

We drove through the dark streets of the city. I sat in the back, felt the van swaying. I had no idea where we were going, but when I got out I knew immediately where I was. I looked at my father, horrified, expecting some kind of explanation, but he just shrugged. *Crazy things happen in the city.* They boosted me over the wall, into the garden where I'd played as a child. I could see through the glass window, the high bookshelves against the far wall, the elegant leather sofas.

They were too rich and too trusting. Their watchman was asleep in a rickety wooden chair. I opened the garage door from the inside, and the man woke with a start. My father stepped in and broke his jaw. Felipe dragged him into the garden and tied him to a tree. The watchman sat there, blindfolded and gagged and bleeding, while we disassembled the house. Their possessions were so familiar that it was like stealing from myself.

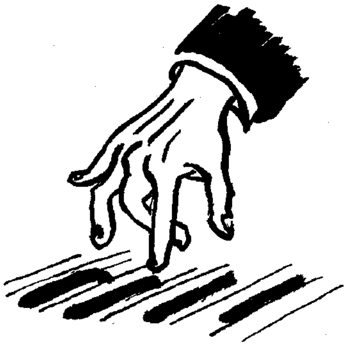
It was terrifying and logical: the riskiest hit of all. I led Felipe and my father around the house like a tour guide: Don't forget the microwave and the blender my mother loves so much. And, in here, the old engineer's nifty calculator and the television with its remote control. There was something beautiful about our silent artistry. Everyone would be a suspect. The gardener, my mother, my father, me. Whichever members of the crew had worked on the house. And the watchman tied to the tree, bleeding into a rag.

The van was full. It was time to go. The watchman's chin was slumped into his chest, his breathing heavy. I felt the conviction that he, too, was one of us, and it disgusted me. It could have been anything: a stray light that shone on him, or a spasm in his face that made me think he was smiling. I kicked him. He snapped to attention, seeing only his blindfold. He struggled against the tree. I hocked something viscous and unclean on his forehead. *The color of money.*

My father called me, and we disappeared.

She left Carmela's and I followed her. She got on the bus at Manco Cápac. She wore her uniform, as clean and as white as a high summer cloud. She didn't notice me behind her, sat across from me innocently, not even looking in my direction. I closed my eyes, felt the rumble of the bus along the potholed avenue. The ticket collector sang the route: La Victoria, San Borja! La Victoria, San Borja! Between the standing passengers, I could still catch glimpses of her. No one sat in the empty seat beside me. Then she stood. She got off, and I followed.

I knew the way, of course, to the Azcárates' house, where I once kept my mother company and did my homework in the garden. The house my father and I had violated, nearly sacrificing her livelihood. But she had always been safe there. And, worse, I had, too. They'd welcomed me into their looted house, consoled me when I cried. *You're too old for that, Chino. Look, they didn't steal the books.* The old engineer with his generous heart, trying to make me feel better.



I trailed half a block behind her now, an expert in my clumsy green shoes, marching down the very center of an empty street. "Ma!" I shouted. "Ma!" She half turned, and then sped up at the sight of me. I rushed to keep pace with her. "Ma!" I shouted again. "Ma, it's Oscar! It's Chino!"

She stopped beneath a flowering tree. "*Hijo?*" she said. "Is that you?"

I hadn't seen her since the *velorio.* I had left her to bury the old man without me. She had held his hand and watched him die. She had put him in the earth and covered him.

"It's me, Ma."

"Chino! You scared me!"

"I'm sorry, Ma."

"Your nose, Chino?"

I pulled off my red nose, let it drop to the ground.

"And your shoes? What's all this?"

I stepped out of the clown shoes and kicked them toward the sidewalk. "I'm writing a story, Ma. For the paper."

She nodded, not understanding.

"I'm sorry," I repeated.

"Where have you been, Chino?"

"Here and there," I said. I took off my jester's hat. "I'm here now."

She took me in her arms and stroked my hair. She kissed my forehead and wiped the paint from my cheeks. "Are you all right?"

"I came to Carmela's, but I didn't knock."

"You should have," she said. "Will you?"

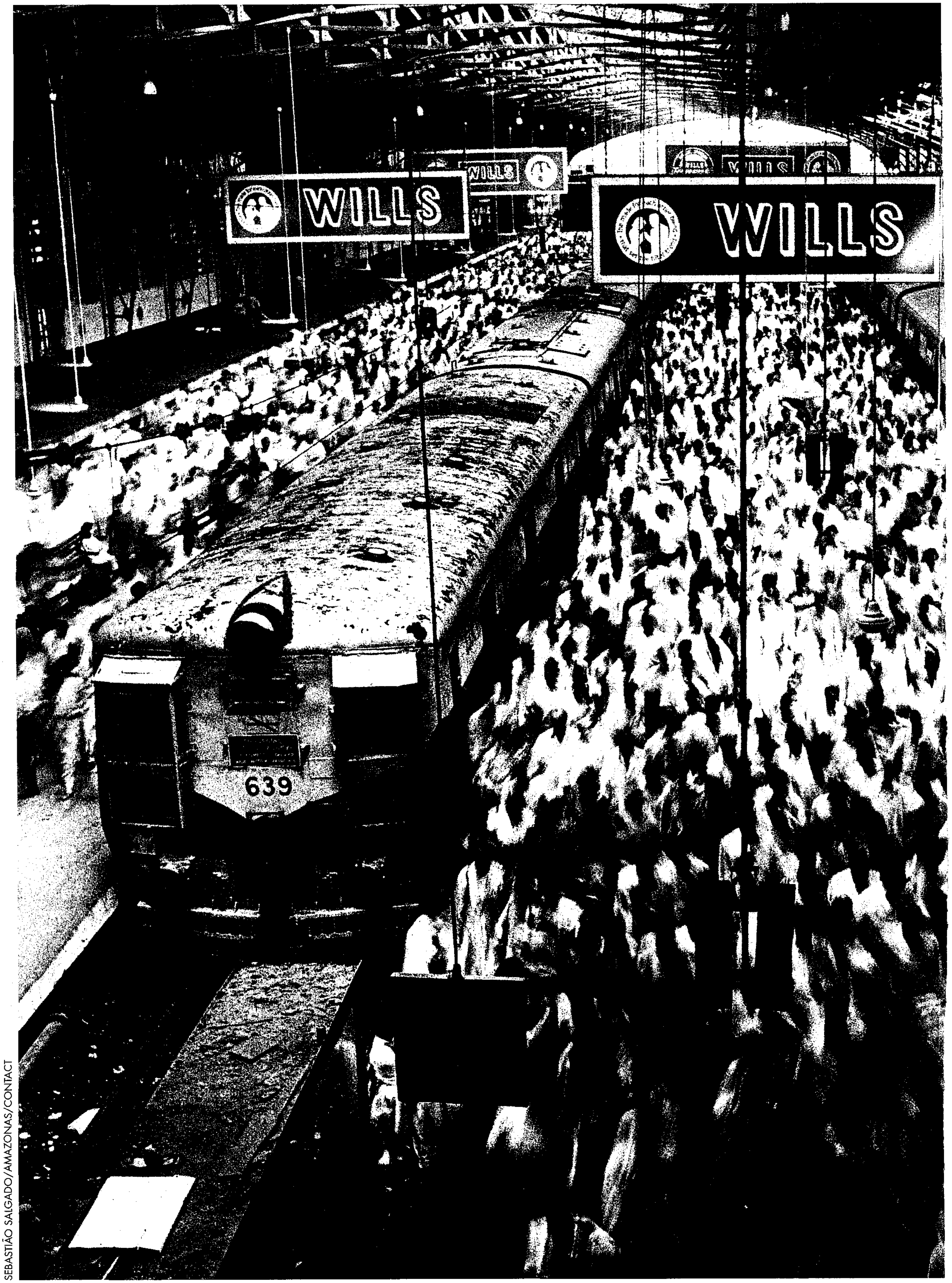
"I don't know," I said. "Did he ask about me?"

It was a travesty, my wanting to know, but I did. She held me tighter. My face paint was running, coming off in white streaks on the sleeve of my suit. "He missed you, Chino," she said.

I felt the warm salty wet of her cheek against mine, and it was good to be held.

"I missed you, too," my mother said.

"I won't leave you again," I told her. But a shiver passed over me. I knew in my heart that the clown was lying. ♦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SEBASTIÃO SALGADO/AMAZONAS/CONTACT

JOHN MILLER
JOHN MILLER
JOHN MILLER

FICTION

GOGOL

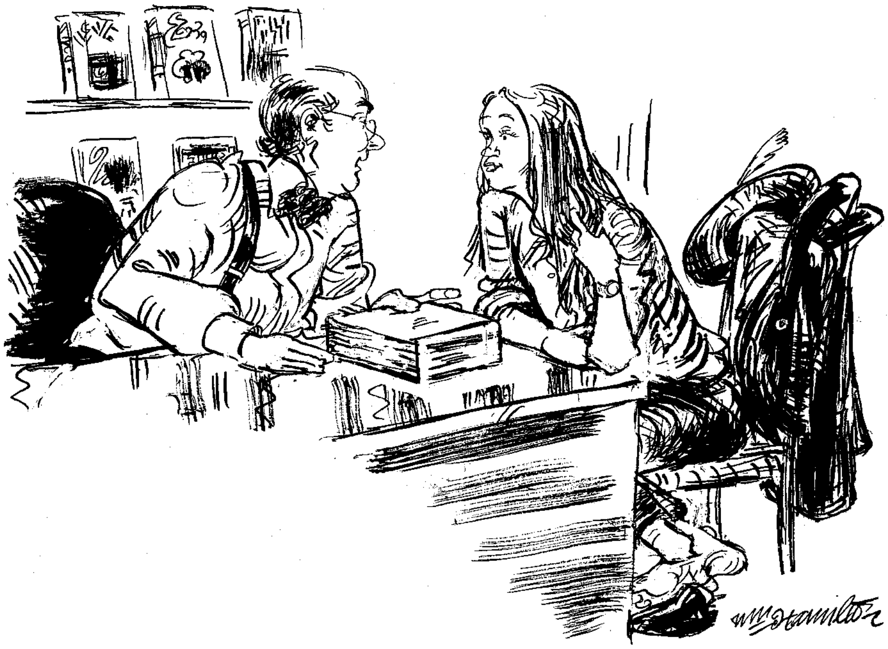
BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

In a hospital waiting room in Cambridge, Ashoke Ganguli hunches over a Boston *Globe* from a month ago, abandoned on a neighboring chair. He reads about the riots that took place during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and about Dr. Benjamin Spock, the baby doctor, being sentenced to two years in jail for threatening to counsel draft evaders. The Favre Leuba strapped to his wrist is running six minutes ahead of the large gray-faced clock on the wall. It is four-thirty in the morning.

He desperately needs a cup of tea, not having managed to make one before leaving the house. But the machine in the corridor dispenses only coffee, tepid at best, in paper cups. He takes off his thick-rimmed glasses, fitted by a Calcutta optometrist, and polishes the lenses with the cotton handkerchief he always keeps in his pocket, "A" for Ashoke embroidered by his mother in light-blue thread. His black hair, normally combed back neatly from his forehead, is dishevelled, sections of it on end. He stands and begins pacing, as the other expectant fathers do. The men wait with cigars, flowers, address books, bottles of champagne. They smoke cigarettes, ashing onto the floor. Ashoke, a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at M.I.T., is indifferent to such indulgences. He neither smokes nor drinks alcohol of any kind. Ashima is the one who keeps all their addresses, in a small notebook she carries in her purse. It has never occurred to him to buy his wife flowers.

He returns to the *Globe*, still pacing as he reads. A slight limp causes Ashoke's right foot to drag almost imperceptibly with each step. Since childhood he has had the habit and the ability to read while walking, holding a book in one hand on his way to school, from room to room in his parents' three-story house in Alipore, and up and down the red clay stairs. Nothing roused him. Nothing distracted him. Nothing caused him to stumble. As a teen-ager he had gone through all of Dickens. He read newer authors as well, Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham, all purchased from his favorite stall on College Street with *pujo* money. But most of all he loved the Russians. His paternal grandfather, a former professor of European literature at Calcutta University, had read from them aloud in English translation when Ashoke was a boy. Each day at teatime, as his brothers and sisters played *kabadi* and cricket outside, Ashoke would go to his grandfather's room, and for an hour his grandfather would read supine on the bed, his ankles crossed and the book propped open on his chest, Ashoke curled at his side. For that hour Ashoke was deaf and blind to the world around him. He did not hear his brothers and sisters laughing on the rooftop, or see the tiny, dusty, cluttered room in which his grandfather read. "Read all the Russians, and then reread them," his grandfather had said. "They will never fail you." When Ashoke's English was good enough, he began to read the books himself. It was while walking on some of the world's noisiest, busiest streets, on Chowringhee and Gariahat Road, that he had read pages of "The Brothers Karamazov," and "Anna Karenina," and "Fathers and Sons." Ashoke's mother was always convinced that her eldest son would be hit by a bus or a tram, his nose deep into "War and Peace"—that he would be reading a book the moment he died.

One day, in the earliest hours of October 20, 1961, this nearly happened. Ashoke was twenty-two, a student at Bengal Engineering College. He was travelling on the No. 83 Up Howrah–Ranchi Express to visit his grandparents in Jamshedpur, where they had moved upon his grandfather's retirement from the university. Ashoke had never spent the Durga *pujo* holidays away from his family. But his grandfather had recently gone blind, and he had requested Ashoke's company specifically, to read him *The Statesman* in the morning, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy in the afternoon. Ashoke accepted the invitation eagerly. He carried two suitcases, the first one containing clothes and gifts, the second empty. For it would be on this visit, his grandfather had said, that the books in his glass-fronted case, collected over a lifetime and preserved under lock and key, would be given to Ashoke. He had already received a few in recent years, given to him on birthdays and other special occasions. But now that the day had come to inherit the rest, the day his grandfather could no longer read the books himself, Ashoke was saddened, and as he placed the empty suitcase under his seat he was disconcerted by its weightlessness, regretful of the circumstances that would cause it, upon his return, to be full.



"You have written more than a book, Ms. McBean—
you have written a franchise."

He carried a single volume for the journey, a hardbound collection of short stories by Nikolai Gogol, which his grandfather had given him when he'd graduated from class twelve. On the title page, beneath his grandfather's signature, Ashoke had written his own. Because of his passion for this particular book, the spine had recently split, threatening to divide the pages into two sections. His favorite story in the book was the last, "The Overcoat," and that was the one Ashoke had begun to reread as the train, late in the evening, pulled out of Howrah Station with a prolonged and deafening shriek, away from his parents and his six younger brothers and sisters, all of whom had come to see him off, and had huddled until the last moment by the window, waving to him from the long, dusky platform.

Outside the view turned quickly black, the scattered lights of Howrah giving way to nothing at all. He had a second-class sleeper, in the seventh bogie behind the air-conditioned coach. Because of the season, the train was especially crowded, filled with families on holiday. Small children were wearing their best clothing, the girls with brightly colored ribbons in their hair. He shared his compartment with three others. There was a middle-aged Bihari couple who, he gathered from overhearing their conversation, had just married off their eldest daughter, and a friendly, potbellied, middle-aged Bengali businessman wearing a suit and tie, by the name of Ghosh. Ghosh told Ashoke that he had recently spent two years in England on a job voucher, but that he had come back home because his wife was inconsolably miserable abroad. Ghosh spoke reverently of England. The sparkling, empty streets, the polished black cars, the rows of gleaming white houses, he said, were like a dream. Trains departed and arrived according to schedule, Ghosh said. No one spat on the sidewalks. It was in a British hospital that his son had been born.

"Seen much of this world?" Ghosh asked Ashoke, untying his shoes and settling himself cross-legged on the berth. He pulled a packet of Dunhill cigarettes from his jacket pocket, offering them around the compartment before lighting one for himself. "You are still young. Free," he said, spreading his hands apart for emphasis. "Do yourself a favor. Before it's too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late."

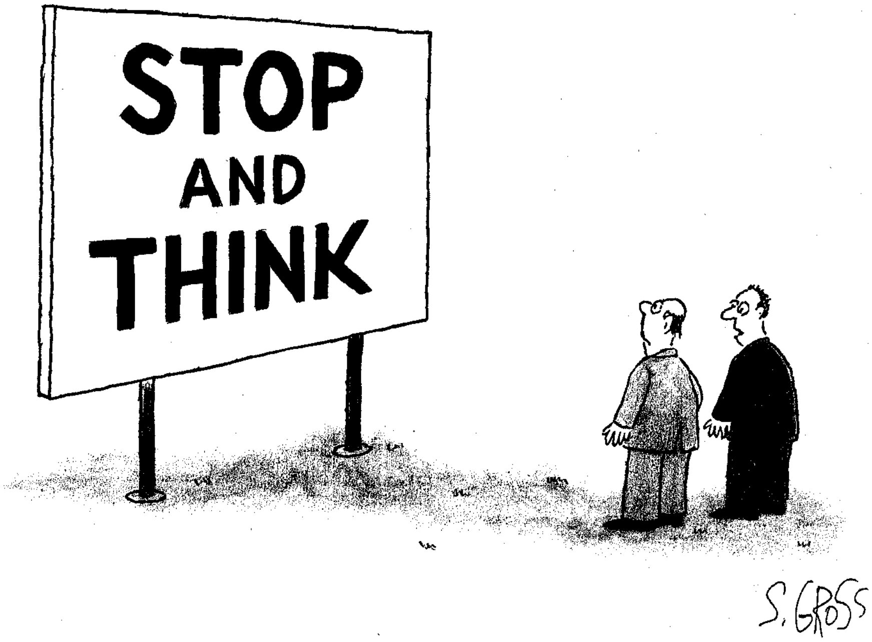
"My grandfather always says that's what books are for," Ashoke said, using the opportunity to open the volume in his hands. "To travel without moving an inch."

"To each his own," Ghosh said. He tipped his head politely to one side, letting the last of the cigarette drop from his fingertips. He reached into a bag by his feet and took out his diary, turning to the twentieth of October. The page was blank, and on it, with a fountain pen whose cap he ceremoniously unscrewed, he wrote his name and address. He ripped out the page and handed it to Ashoke. "If you ever change your mind and need contacts, let me know. I live in Tollygunge, just behind the tram depot."

"Thank you," Ashoke said, folding up the information and putting it at the back of his book.

"How about a game of cards?" Ghosh suggested. He pulled out a well-worn deck from his suit pocket, with an image of Big Ben on the back. But Ashoke politely declined. One by one the passengers brushed their teeth in the vestibule, changed into their pajamas, fastened the curtain around their compartments, and went to sleep. Ghosh offered to take the upper berth, climbing barefoot up the ladder, his suit carefully folded away, so that Ashoke had the window to himself. The Bihari couple shared some sweets from a box and drank water from the same cup without either of them putting their lips to the rim, then settled into their berths as well, switching off the lights and turning their heads to the wall.

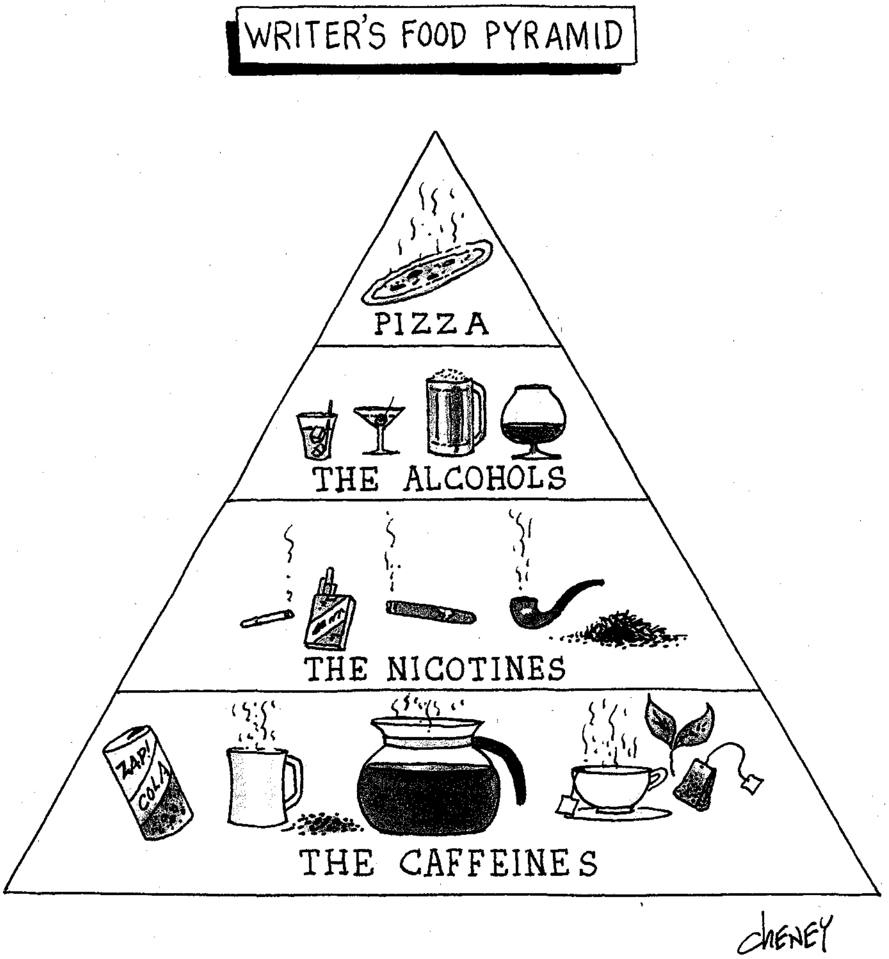
Only Ashoke continued to read, still seated, still dressed. A single small bulb glowed dimly over his head. From time to time he looked through the open window at the inky Bengal night, at the vague shapes of palm trees and the simplest of homes. Carefully he turned the soft yellow pages of his book, a few delicately tunnelled by worms. The steam engine puffed reassuringly, powerfully. Deep in his chest he felt the rough jostle of the wheels. Sparks from the smokestack passed by his window. A fine layer of sticky soot dotted one side of his face, his eyelid, his arm, his neck; his grandmother would insist that he scrub himself with a cake of Margo soap as soon as he arrived. Immersed in the sartorial plight of Akaky Akakyevich, lost in the wide, snow-white, windy avenues of St. Petersburg, unaware that one day he was to dwell in a snowy place himself, Ashoke was still reading at two-thirty in the morning, one of the few passengers on the train who was awake, when the locomotive engine and seven bogies derailed from the broad-gauge line. The sound was like a bomb exploding. The first four bogies capsized into a depression alongside the track. The fifth and sixth, containing the first-class and air-conditioned passengers, telescoped into each other, killing the passengers in their sleep. The seventh, where Ashoke was sitting, capsized as well, flung by the speed of the crash farther into the field. The accident occurred two hundred and nine kilometres from Calcutta, between the Ghatshila and Dhalbumgarh stations. More than an hour passed before the rescuers arrived, bearing lanterns and shovels and axes to pry bodies from the cars.



"It sort of makes you stop and think, doesn't it."

Ashoke can still remember their shouts, asking if anyone was alive. He remembers trying to shout back, unsuccessfully, his mouth emitting nothing but the faintest rasp. He remembers the sound of people half-dead around him, moaning and tapping on the walls of the train, whispering hoarsely for help, words that only those who were also trapped and injured could possibly hear. Blood drenched his chest and the left arm of his shirt. He had been thrust partway out the window. He remembers being unable to see anything at all; for the first hours he thought that perhaps, like his grandfather, he'd gone blind. He remembers the acrid odor of flames, the buzzing of flies, children crying, the taste of dust and blood on his tongue. They were nowhere, somewhere in a field. Milling about them were villagers, police inspectors, a few doctors. He remembers believing that he was dying, that perhaps he was already dead. He could not feel the lower half of his body, and so was unaware that the mangled limbs of Ghosh were draped over his legs. Eventually he saw the cold, unfriendly blue of earliest morning, the moon and a few stars still lingering in the sky. The pages of his book, which had been tossed from his hand, fluttered in two sections a few feet away from the train. The glare from a search lantern briefly caught the pages, momentarily distracting one of the rescuers. "Nothing here," Ashoke heard someone say. "Let's keep going."

But the lantern's light lingered, just long enough for Ashoke to raise his



hand, a gesture that he believed would consume the small fragment of life left in him. He was still clutching a single page of "The Overcoat," crumpled tightly in his fist, and when he raised his hand the wad of paper dropped from his fingers. "Wait!" he heard a voice cry out. "The fellow by that book. I saw him move."

He was pulled from the wreckage, placed on a stretcher, transported on another train to a hospital in Tatanagar. He had broken his pelvis, his right femur, and three of his ribs on the right side. For the next year of his life he lay flat on his back, ordered to keep as still as possible while the bones of his body healed. There was a risk that his right leg might be permanently paralyzed. He was transferred to Calcutta Medical College, where two screws were put into his hips. By December he had returned to his parents' house in Alipore, carried through the courtyard and up the red clay stairs like a corpse, hoisted on the shoulders of his four brothers. Three times a day he was spoon-fed. He urinated and defecated into a tin pan. Doctors and visitors came and went. Even his blind grandfather from Jamshedpur paid a visit. His family had saved the newspaper accounts. In a photograph, Ashoke observed the train smashed to shards, piled jaggedly against the sky, security guards sitting on the unclaimed belongings. He learned that fishplates and bolts had been found several feet from the main track, giving rise to the suspicion, never subsequently confirmed, of sabotage. "HOLIDAY-MAKERS' TRYST WITH DEATH," the *Times of India* had written.

During the day he was groggy from painkillers. At night he dreamed either that he was still trapped inside the train or, worse, that the accident had never happened, that he was walking down a street, taking a bath, sitting cross-legged on the floor and eating a plate of food. And then he would wake up, coated in sweat, tears streaming down his face, convinced that he would never live to do such things again. Eventually, in an attempt to avoid his nightmares, he began to read, late at night, which was when his motionless body felt most restless, his mind agile and clear. Yet he refused to read the Russians his grandfather had brought to his bedside, or any novels, for that matter. Those books, set in countries he had never seen, reminded him only of his confinement. Instead he read his engineering books, trying his best to keep up with his courses, solving equations by flashlight. In those silent hours, he thought often of Ghosh. "Pack a pillow and a blanket," he heard Ghosh say. He remembered the address Ghosh had written, somewhere behind the tram depot in Tollygunge. Now it was the home of a widow, a fatherless son. Each day, to bolster his spirits, his family reminded him of the future, the day he would stand unassisted, walk across the room. It was for this, each day, that his father and mother prayed. But, as the months passed, Ashoke began to envision another sort of future. He imagined not only walking, but walking away, as far as he could, from the place where he was born and where he had nearly died. The following year, walking with a cane, he returned to college and graduated, and without telling his parents he applied to continue his engineering studies abroad. Only after he'd been accepted with a full fellowship, a newly issued passport in hand, did he inform them of his plans. "But we already nearly lost you once," his bewildered father had protested. His siblings had pleaded and wept. His mother, speechless, had refused food for three days. In spite of all that, he'd gone.

Seven years later, there are still certain images that wipe him flat. They lurk around a corner as he rushes through the engineering department at M.I.T. They hover by his shoulder as he leans over a plate of rice at dinnertime, or nestles against Ashima's limbs at night. At every turning point in his life—at his wedding, in Calcutta, when he stood behind Ashima, encircling her waist and peering over her shoulder as they poured puffed rice into a fire, or during his first hours in America, seeing a small gray city caked with snow—he has tried but failed to push these images away: the twisted, battered, capsized bogies of the train, his body twisted below it, the terrible crunching sound he had heard but not comprehended, his bones crushed as fine as flour. It is not the memory of pain that haunts him; he has no memory of that. It is the memory of waiting before he was rescued, and the persistent fear, rising up in his throat, that he might not have been rescued at all. At times he still presses his ribs to make sure they are solid.

He presses them now, in the hospital, shaking his head in relief, disbelief. Although it is Ashima who carries the child, he, too, feels heavy, with the thought of life, of his life and the life about to come from it. He was raised without running water, nearly killed at twenty-two. He was born twice in India, and then a third time, in America. Three lives by thirty. For this he thanks his parents, and their parents, and the parents of their parents. He does not thank God; he openly reveres Marx and quietly refuses religion. Instead of thanking God he thanks Gogol, the Russian writer who had saved his life, when the nurse enters the waiting room.

The baby, a boy, is born at half past five in the morning. He measures twenty inches long, weighs seven pounds nine ounces. When Ashoke arrives, the nurse is taking Ashima's blood pressure, and Ashima is reclining against a pile of pillows, the child wrapped like an oblong white parcel in her arms. Beside the bed is a bassinet, labelled with a card that says "Baby Boy Ganguli."

"He's here," she says quietly, looking up at Ashoke with a weak smile. Her skin is faintly yellow, the color missing from her lips. She has circles beneath her eyes, and her hair, spilling from its braid, looks as though it had not been combed for days. Her voice is hoarse, as if she'd caught a cold. He pulls up a chair by the side of the bed and the nurse helps to transfer the child from mother's to father's arms. In the process, the child pierces the silence in the room with a short-lived cry. His parents react with mutual alarm, but the nurse laughs approvingly. "You see," she says to Ashima, "he's already getting to know you."

At first Ashoke is more perplexed than moved, by the pointiness of the head, the puffiness of the lids, the small white spots on the cheeks, the fleshy upper lip that droops prominently over the lower one. The skin is paler than either Ashima's or his own, translucent enough to show slim green veins at the temples. The scalp is covered by a mass of wispy black hair. He attempts to count the eyelashes. He feels gently through the flannel for the hands and feet.

"It's all there," Ashima says, watching her husband. "I already checked."

"What are the eyes like? Why won't he open them? Has he opened them?"

She nods.

"What can he see? Can he see us?"

"I think so. But not very clearly. And not in full color. Not yet."

They sit in silence, the three of them as still as stones. "How are you feeling? Was it all right?" he asks Ashima after a while.

But there is no answer, and when Ashoke lifts his gaze from his son's face he sees that she, too, is sleeping.

When he looks back to the child, the eyes are open, staring up at him, unblinking, as dark as the hair on its head. The face is transformed; Ashoke has never seen a more perfect thing. He imagines himself as a dark, grainy, blurry presence. As a father to his son. Being rescued from that shattered train had been the first miracle of his life. But here, now, reposing in his arms, weighing next to nothing but changing everything, is the second.

Because neither set of grandparents has a working telephone, the couple's only link to home is by telegram, which Ashoke has sent to both sides in Calcutta: "With your blessings, boy and mother fine." As for a name, they have decided to let Ashima's grandmother, who is past eighty now, who has named each of her six other great-grandchildren in the world, do the honors. Ashima's grandmother has mailed the letter herself, walking with her cane to the post office, her first trip out of the house in a decade. The letter contains one name for a girl, one for a boy. Ashima's grandmother has revealed them to no one.

Though the letter was sent a month ago, in July, it has yet to arrive. Ashima and Ashoke are not terribly concerned. After all, they both know, an infant doesn't really need a name. He needs to be fed and blessed, to be given some gold and silver, to be patted on the back after feedings and held carefully behind the neck. Names can wait. In India parents take their time. It wasn't unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined. Ashima and Ashoke can both cite examples of cousins who were not officially named until they were registered, at six or seven, in school. Besides, there are always pet names to tide one over: a practice of Bengali nomenclature grants, to every single person, two names. In Bengali the word for "pet name" is *daknam*, meaning literally the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people. Every pet name is paired with a "good name," a *bhalonam*, for identification in the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places. Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Ashima means "she who is limitless, without borders." Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means "he who transcends grief." Pet names have no such aspirations. They are never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered.

Three days come and go. Ashima is shown by the nursing staff how to change diapers and how to clean the umbilical stub. She is given hot saltwater baths to soothe her bruises and stitches. She is given a list of pediatricians, and countless brochures on breast-feeding and bonding and immunizing, and samples of baby shampoos and Q-Tips and creams. The fourth day there is good news and bad news. The good news is that Ashima and the baby are to be discharged the following morning. The bad news is that they are told by Mr. Wilcox, compiler of hospital birth certificates, that they must choose a name for their son. For they learn that in America a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate. And that a birth certificate needs a name.

"But, sir," Ashima protests, "we can't possibly name him ourselves."

Mr. Wilcox, slight, bald, unamused, glances at the couple, both visibly distressed, then glances at the nameless child. "I see," he says. "The reason being?"

"We are waiting for a letter," Ashoke says, explaining the situation in detail.

"I see," Mr. Wilcox says again. "That is unfortunate. I'm afraid your only alternative is to have the certificate read 'Baby Boy Ganguli.' You will, of course, be required to amend the permanent record when a name is decided upon."

Ashima looks at Ashoke expectantly. "Is that what we should do?"

"I don't recommend it," Mr. Wilcox says. "You will have to appear before a judge, pay a fee. The red tape is endless."

"Oh dear," Ashoke says.

Mr. Wilcox nods, and silence ensues. "Don't you have any backups?" he asks. "Something in reserve, in case you didn't like what your grandmother has chosen."

Ashima and Ashoke shake their heads. It has never occurred to either of them to question Ashima's grandmother's selection, to disregard an elder's wishes in such a way.

"You can always name him after yourself, or one of your ancestors," Mr. Wilcox suggests, admitting that he is actually Howard Wilcox III. "It's a fine tradition. The kings of France and England did it," he adds.

But this isn't possible. This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after father or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed in India. Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared.

"Then what about naming him after another person? Someone you greatly admire?" Mr. Wilcox says, his eyebrows raised hopefully. He sighs. "Think about it. I'll be back in a few hours," he tells them, exiting the room.

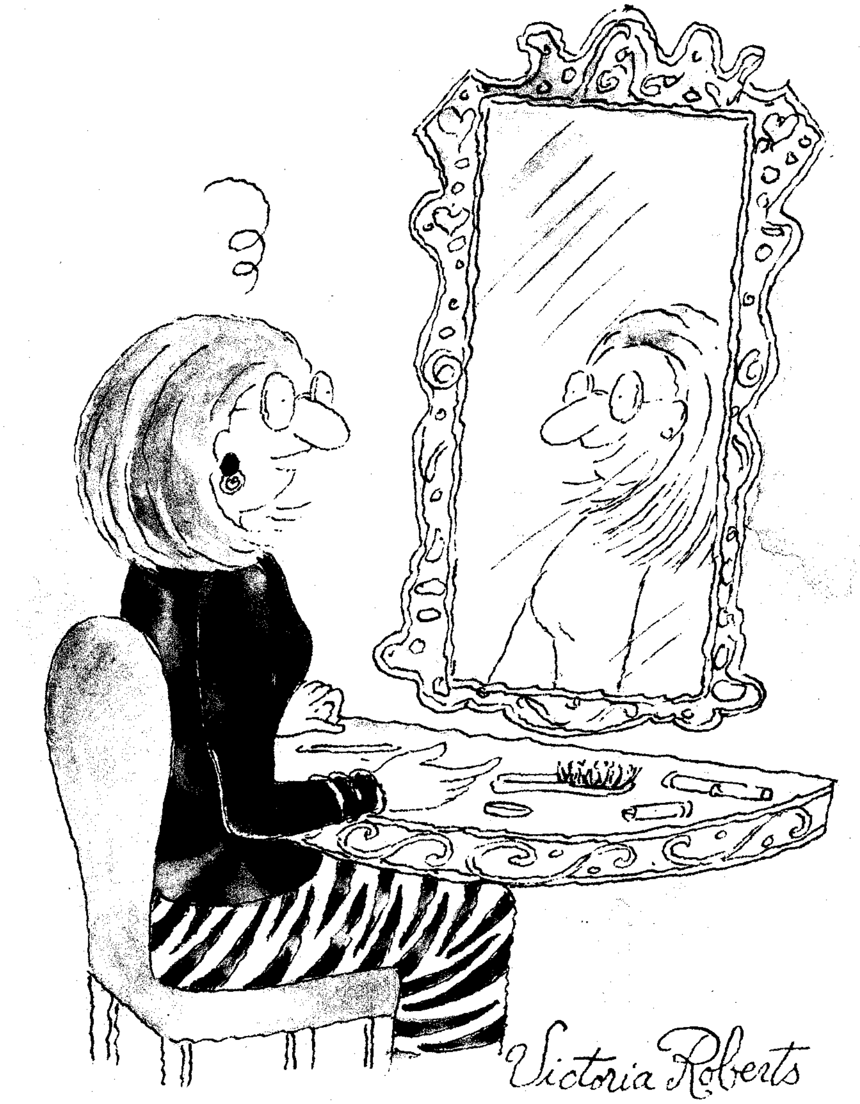
The door shuts, which is when, with a slight quiver of recognition, as if he'd known it all along, the perfect pet name for his son occurs to Ashoke.

"Hello, Gogol," he whispers, leaning over his son's haughty face, his tightly bundled body. "Gogol," he repeats, satisfied. The baby turns his head with an expression of extreme consternation and yawns.

Ashima approves, aware that the name stands not only for her son's life but for her husband's. She'd first heard the story of the accident soon after their marriage was arranged, when Ashoke was still a stranger to her. But the thought of it now makes her blood go cold. There are nights when she has been woken by her husband's muffled screams, times they have ridden the subway together and the rhythm of the wheels on the tracks makes him suddenly pensive, aloof. She has never read any Gogol herself, but she is willing to place him on a shelf in her mind, along with Tennyson and Wordsworth. When Mr. Wilcox returns with his typewriter, Ashoke spells out the name. Thus Gogol Ganguli is registered in the hospital's files. A first photograph, somewhat overexposed, is taken that broiling-hot, late summer's day: Gogol, an indistinct blanketed mass, reposing in his weary mother's arms. She stands on the steps of the hospital, staring at the camera, her eyes squinting into the sun. Her husband looks on from one side, his wife's suitcase in his hand, smiling with his head lowered. "Gogol enters the world," his father will eventually write on the back in Bengali letters.

Letters arrive from Ashima's parents, from Ashoke's parents, from aunts and uncles and cousins and friends, from everyone, it seems, but Ashima's grandmother. The letters are filled with every possible blessing and good wish, composed in an alphabet they have seen all around them for most of their lives, on billboards and newspapers and awnings, but which they see now only in these precious, pale-blue missives.

In November, when Gogol is three months old, he develops a mild ear infection. When Ashima and Ashoke see their son's pet name typed on the label of



"Work with me."

a prescription for antibiotics, when they see it at the top of his immunization record, it doesn't look right; pet names aren't meant to be made public in this way. But there is still no letter from Ashima's grandmother, and they are forced to conclude that it is lost in the mail. The very next day a letter arrives in Cambridge. The letter is dated three weeks ago, and from it they learn that Ashima's grandmother has had a stroke, that her right side is permanently paralyzed, her mind dim. She can no longer chew, barely swallows, remembers and recognizes little of her eighty-odd years. "She is with us still, but to be honest we have already lost her," Ashima's father has written. "Prepare yourself, Ashima. Perhaps you may not see her again."

It is their first piece of bad news from home. Ashoke barely knows Ashima's grandmother, only vaguely recalls touching her feet at his wedding, but Ashima is inconsolable for days. She sits at home with Gogol as the leaves turn brown and drop from the trees, as the days begin to grow quickly, mercilessly dark. Unlike Ashima's parents, and her other relatives, her grandmother, her dida, had not admonished Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston. Her grandmother had not been fearful of such signs of betrayal; she was the only person to predict, rightly, that Ashima would never change. A few days before leaving Calcutta, Ashima had stood, her head lowered, under her late grandfather's portrait, asking him to bless her journey. Then she bent down to touch the dust of her dida's feet to her head.

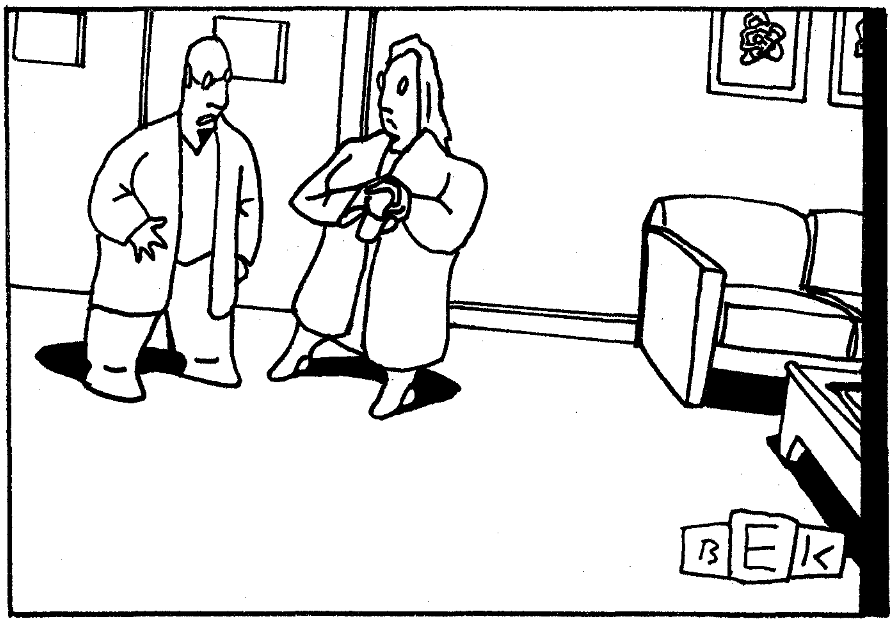
"Dida, I'm coming," Ashima had said. For this was the phrase Bengalis always used in place of goodbye.

"Enjoy it," her grandmother had bellowed in her thundering voice, helping Ashima to straighten. With trembling hands, her grandmother had pressed her thumbs to the tears streaming down Ashima's face, wiping them away. "Do what I will never do. It will all be for the best. Remember that. Now go."

By 1971, the Gangulis have moved to a university town outside Boston, where Ashoke has been hired as an assistant professor of electrical engineering at the university. In exchange for teaching five classes, he earns sixteen thousand dollars a year. He is given his own office, with his name etched onto a strip of black plastic by the door. The job is everything Ashoke has ever dreamed of. He had always hoped to teach in a university rather than work for a corporation. What a thrill, he thinks, to stand lecturing before a roomful of American students. What a sense of accomplishment it gives him to see his name printed under "Faculty" in the university directory. From his fourth-floor office he has a sweeping view of the quadrangle, surrounded by vine-covered brick buildings. On Fridays, after he has taught his last class, he visits the library, to read international newspapers on long wooden poles. He reads about American planes bombing Vietcong supply routes in Cambodia, Naxalites being murdered on the streets of Calcutta, India and Pakistan going to war. At times he wanders up to the library's sun-filled, unpopulated top floor, where all the literature is shelved. He browses in the aisles, gravitating most often toward his beloved Russians, where he is particularly comforted, each time, by his son's name stamped in golden letters on the spines of a row of red and green and blue hardbound books.

Ashoke and Ashima purchase a shingled two-story colonial in a recently built development, a house previously occupied by no one, erected on a quarter acre of land. This is the small patch of America to which they lay claim. Gogol accompanies his parents to banks, sits waiting as they sign the endless papers. Ashoke and Ashima are amazed, when moving by U-Haul to the new house, to discover how much they possess; each of them had come to America with a single suitcase, a few weeks' worth of clothes. The walls of the new house are painted, the driveway sealed with pitch, the shingles and sundeck weatherproofed and stained. Ashoke takes photographs of every room, Gogol standing somewhere in the frame, to send to relatives in India. He is a sturdily built child, with full cheeks but already pensive features. When he poses for the camera he has to be coaxed into a smile.

In the beginning, in the evenings, his family goes for drives, exploring their new environs bit by bit: the neglected dirt lanes, the shaded back roads. The back seat of the car is sheathed with plastic, the ashtrays on the doors still sealed. Sometimes they drive out of the town altogether, to one of the beaches along the North Shore. Even in summer, they never go to swim or to turn brown beneath the sun. Instead they go dressed in their ordinary clothes. By the time they arrive, the ticket collector's booth is



"Truthfully, we don't know if he's going to rock on."

• •

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empty, the crowds gone; there are only a handful of cars in the parking lot. Together, as the Gangulis drive, they anticipate the moment the thin blue line of ocean will come into view. On the beach Gogol collects rocks, digs tunnels in the sand. He and his father wander barefoot, their pant legs rolled halfway up their calves. He watches his father raise a kite within minutes into the wind, so high that Gogol must tip his head back in order to see, a rippling speck against the sky.

The August that Gogol turns five, Ashima discovers she is pregnant again. In the mornings she forces herself to eat a slice of toast, only because Ashoke makes it for her and watches her while she chews it in bed. Her head constantly spins. She spends her days lying down, a pink plastic wastepaper basket by her side, the shades drawn, her mouth and teeth coated with the taste of metal. Sometimes Gogol lies beside her in his parents' bedroom, reading a picture book, or coloring with crayons. "You're going to be an older brother," she tells him one day. "There'll be someone to call you Dada. Won't that be exciting?"

In the evenings, Gogol and his father eat together, alone, a week's worth of chicken curry and rice, which his father cooks in two battered Dutch ovens every Sunday. As the food reheats, his father tells Gogol to shut the bedroom door because his mother cannot tolerate the smell. It is odd to see his father presiding in the kitchen, standing in his mother's place at the stove. When they sit down at the table, the sound of his parents' conversation is missing.

Because his mother tends to vomit the moment she finds herself in a moving car, she is unable to accompany Ashoke to take Gogol, in September of 1973, to his first day of kindergarten at the town's public elementary school. By the time Gogol starts, it is already the second week of the school year. For the past week, Gogol has been in bed, just like his mother, listless, without appetite, claiming to have a stomach ache, even vomiting one day into his mother's pink wastepaper basket. He doesn't want to go to kindergarten. He doesn't want to wear the new clothes his mother has bought him from Sears, hanging on a knob of his dresser, or carry his Charlie Brown lunchbox, or board the yellow school bus that stops at the end of Pemberton Road.

There is a reason Gogol doesn't want to go to kindergarten. His parents have told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, a good name, which his parents have finally decided on, just in time for him to begin his formal education. The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning "he who is entire, encompassing all," but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol's. Ashoke thought of it recently, staring mindlessly at the Gogol spines in the library, and he rushed back to the house to ask Ashima her opinion. He pointed out that it was relatively easy to pronounce, though there was the danger that Americans, obsessed with abbreviation, would truncate it to Nick. She told him she liked it well enough, though later, alone, she'd wept, thinking of her grandmother, who had died earlier in the year, and of the letter, forever hovering somewhere between India and America.

But Gogol can't understand why he has to answer to anything else. "Why do I have to have a new name?" he asks his parents, tears springing to his eyes. It would be one thing if his parents were to call him Nikhil, too. But they tell him that the new name will be used only by the teachers and children at school. He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him. His parents tell him that they each have two names, too, as do all their Bengali friends in America, and all their relatives in Calcutta. It's a part of growing up, they tell him, part of being a Bengali. They write it for him on a sheet of paper, ask him to copy it over ten times. "Don't worry," his father says. "To me and your mother, you will never be anyone but Gogol."

At school, Ashoke and Gogol are greeted by the secretary, who asks Ashoke to fill out a registration form. He provides a copy of Gogol's birth certificate and immunization records, which are put in a folder along with the registration. "This way," the secretary says, leading them to the principal's office.

Candace Lapidus, the name on the door says. Mrs. Lapidus assures Ashoke that missing the first week of kindergarten is not a problem, that things have yet to settle down. Mrs. Lapidus is a tall, slender woman with short white-blond hair. She wears frosted blue eye shadow and a lemon-yellow suit. She shakes Ashoke's hand and tells him that there are two other Indian children at the school, Jayadev Modi, in the third grade, and Rekha Saxena, in fifth. Perhaps the Gangulis know them? Ashoke tells Mrs. Lapidus that they do not. She looks at the registration form and smiles kindly at the boy, who is clutching his father's hand. Gogol is dressed in powder-blue pants, red-and-white canvas sneakers, a striped turtleneck top.

"Welcome to elementary school, Nikhil. I am your principal, Mrs. Lapidus."

Gogol looks down at his sneakers. The way the principal pronounces his new name is different from the way his parents say it, the second part of it longer, sounding like "heel."

She bends down so that her face is level with his, and extends a hand to his shoulder. "Can you tell me how old you are, Nikhil?"

When the question is repeated and there is still no response, Mrs. Lapidus asks, "Mr. Ganguli, does Nikhil follow English?"

"Of course he follows," Ashoke says. "My son is perfectly bilingual."

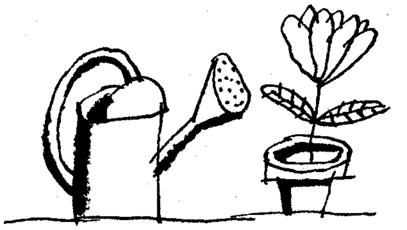
In order to prove that Gogol knows English, Ashoke does something he has never done before, and addresses his son in careful, accented English. "Go on, Gogol," he says, patting him on the head. "Tell Mrs. Lapidus how old you are."

"What was that?" Mrs. Lapidus says.

"I beg your pardon, Madam?"

"That name you called him. Something with a 'G.'"

"Oh that, that is what we call him at home only. But his good name should be—is"—he nods his head firmly—"Nikhil."



Mrs. Lapidus frowns. "I'm afraid I don't understand. 'Good name'?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Lapidus studies the registration form. She has not had to go through this confusion with the two other Indian children.

"I'm not sure I follow you, Mr. Ganguli. Do you mean that Nikhil is a middle name? Or a nickname? Many of the children go by nicknames here. On this form there is a space—"

"No, no, it's not a middle name," Ashoke says. He is beginning to lose patience. "He has no middle name. No nickname. The boy's good name, his school name, is Nikhil."

Mrs. Lapidus presses her lips together and smiles. "But clearly he doesn't respond."

"Please, Mrs. Lapidus," Ashoke says. "It is very common for a child to be confused at first. Please give it some time. I assure you he will grow accustomed."

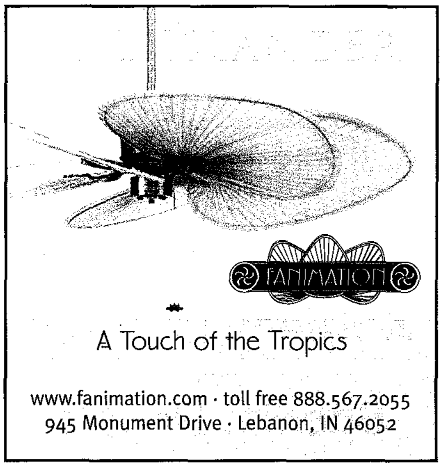
He bends down, and this time in Bengali, calmly and quietly, asks Gogol to please answer when Mrs. Lapidus asks a question. "Don't be scared, Gogol," he says, raising his son's chin with his finger. "You're a big boy now. No tears."

Though Mrs. Lapidus does not understand a word, she listens carefully, hears that name again. Gogol. Lightly, in pencil, she writes it down on the registration form.

Ashoke hands over the lunchbox, a windbreaker in case it gets cold. He thanks Mrs. Lapidus. "Be good, Nikhil," he says in English. And then, after a moment's hesitation, Gogol's father is gone.

At the end of his first day he is sent home with a letter to his parents from Mrs. Lapidus, folded and stapled to a string around his neck, explaining that owing to their son's preference he will be known as Gogol at school. What about the parents' preference? Ashima and Ashoke wonder, shaking their heads.

And so Gogol's formal education begins. At the top of sheets of scratchy pale-yellow paper he writes out his pet name again and again, and the alphabet in capital and lowercase. He learns to add and subtract, and to spell his first words. In the front covers of the textbooks from which he is taught to read he leaves his legacy, writing his name in No. 2 pencil below a series of others. In



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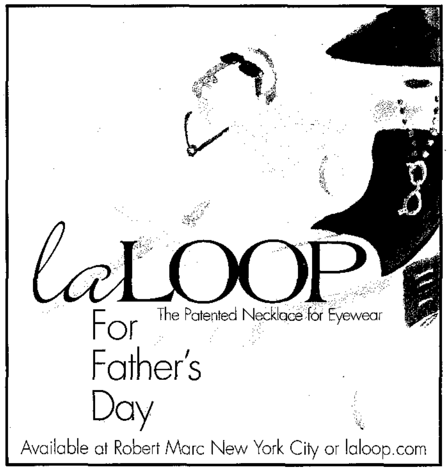

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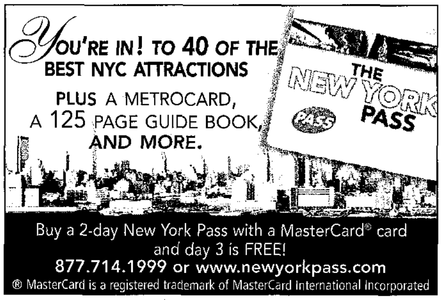

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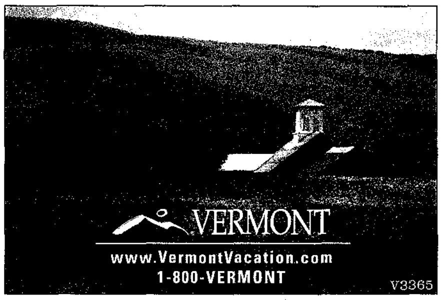

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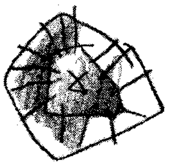
art class, his favorite hour of the week, he carves his name with paper clips into the bottoms of clay cups and bowls. He pastes uncooked pasta to cardboard, and leaves his signature in fat brushstrokes below paintings. Day after day he brings his creations home to Ashima, who hangs them proudly on the refrigerator door. “Gogol G.,” he signs his work in the lower right-hand corner, as if there were a need to distinguish him from any other Gogol in the school.

In May his sister is born. This time, Ashoke and Ashima are ready. They have the names lined up, for a boy or a girl. The only way to avoid confusion, they have concluded, is to do away with the pet name altogether, as many of their Bengali friends have already done. For their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same: Sonali, meaning “she who is golden.” Though Sonali is the name on her birth certificate, the name she will carry officially through life, at home they begin to call her Sonu, then Sona, and, finally, Sonia. Sonia makes her a citizen of the world. It’s a Russian link to her brother, it’s European, South American. Eventually it will be the name of the Indian Prime Minister’s Italian wife.

As a young boy Gogol doesn’t mind his name. He recognizes pieces of himself in road signs: “Go Left,” “Go Right,” “Go Slow.” For birthdays his mother orders a cake on which his name is piped across the white frosted surface in a bright-blue sugary script. It all seems perfectly normal. It doesn’t bother him that his name is never an option on key chains or refrigerator magnets. He has been told that he was named after a famous Russian author, born in a previous century. That the author’s name, and therefore his, is known throughout the world and will live on forever. One day his father takes him to the university library, and shows him, on a shelf well beyond his reach, a row of Gogol spines. When his father opens up one of the books to a random page, the print is far smaller than in the Hardy Boys series Gogol has begun recently to enjoy. “In a few years,” his father tells him, “you’ll be ready to read them.” Though substitute teachers at school always pause, looking apologetically when they arrive at his name on the roster, forcing Gogol to call out, before even being summoned, “That’s me,” his regular teachers know not to give it a second thought. After a year or two, the students no longer tease and say “Giggle” or “Gargle.” In the programs of the school Christmas plays, the parents are accustomed to seeing his name among the cast. “Gogol is an outstanding student, curious and coöperative,” his teachers write year after year on report cards. “Go, Gogol!” his classmates shout on golden autumn days as he runs the bases or sprints in a dash.

As for his last name, Ganguli, by the time he is ten he has been to Calcutta three times, twice in summer and once during Durga *pujo*, and from the most recent trip he still remembers the sight of the name etched respectably into the pink stone façade of his paternal grandparents’ house. He remembers the astonishment of seeing six pages full of Gangulis, three columns to a page, in the Calcutta telephone directory. He’d wanted to rip out the page as a souvenir, but, when he’d told this to one of his cousins, the cousin had laughed. On taxi rides through the city, going to visit the various homes of his relatives, his father had pointed out the name elsewhere, on the awnings of confectioners, and stationers, and opticians. He had told Gogol that Ganguli was a legacy of the British, an anglicized way of pronouncing his real surname, Gangopadhyay.



Back home on Pemberton Road, he helps his father paste individual golden letters bought from a rack in the hardware store, spelling out Ganguli on one side of their mailbox. One morning, the day after Halloween, Gogol discovers, on his way to the bus stop, that it has been shortened to “Gang,” with the word “green” scrawled in pencil following it. He runs back into the house, sickened, certain of the insult his father will feel. Though it is his last name, too, something tells Gogol that the desecration is intended for his parents more than for Sonia and him. For by now he is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents’ accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf. But his father is unaffected at such moments, just as he is unaffected by the mailbox. "It's only boys having fun," he tells Gogol, flicking the matter away with the back of a hand, and that evening they drive to the hardware store, to buy the missing letters again.

Gogol's fourteenth birthday. Like most events in his life, it is another excuse for his parents to throw a party for their Bengali friends. His own friends from school were invited the previous day, for pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work, a basketball game watched together on television, some Ping-Pong in the den. His mother cooks for days beforehand, cramming the refrigerator with stacks of foil-covered trays. She makes sure to prepare his favorite things: lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick *channa* dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese. All this is less stressful to her than the task of feeding a handful of American children, half of whom always claim they are allergic to milk, all of whom refuse to eat the crusts of their bread.

Close to forty guests come, from three different states. Women are dressed in saris far more dazzling than the pants and polo shirts their husbands wear. A group of men sit in a circle on the floor and immediately start a game of poker. These are all his *mashis* and *meshos*, his honorary aunts and uncles. Presents are opened when the guests are gone. Gogol receives several dictionaries, several calculators, several Cross pen-and-pencil sets, several ugly sweaters. His parents give him an Instamatic camera, a new sketchbook, colored pencils and the mechanical pen he'd asked for, and twenty dollars to spend as he wishes. Sonia has made him a card with Magic Markers, on paper she's ripped out of one of his own sketchbooks, which says "Happy Birthday Goggles," the name she insists on calling him instead of Dada. His mother sets aside the things he doesn't like, which is almost everything, to give to his cousins the next time they go to India. Later that night he is alone in his room, listening to side three of the White Album on his parents' cast-off RCA turntable. The album is a present from his American birthday party. Born when the band was near death, Gogol is a passionate devotee of John, Paul, George, and Ringo. He sits cross-legged on the bed, hunched over the lyrics, when he hears a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he hollers, expecting it to be Sonia in her pajamas, asking if she can borrow his Rubik's Cube. He is surprised to see his father, standing there in stocking feet, a small potbelly visible beneath his oat-colored sweater vest, his mustache turning gray. Gogol is especially surprised to see a gift in his father's hands. His father has never given him birthday presents apart from whatever his mother buys, but this year, his father says, walking across the room to where Gogol is sitting, he has something special. The gift is covered in red-and-green-and-gold-striped paper left over from Christmas the year before, taped awkwardly at the seams. It is obviously a book, thick, hardcover, wrapped by his father's own hands. Gogol lifts the paper slowly, but in spite of this the tape leaves a scab. "The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol," the jacket says. Inside, the price has been snipped away on the diagonal.

"I ordered it from the bookstore, just for you," his father says, his voice raised in order to be heard over the music. "It's difficult to find in hardcover these days. It's a British publication, a very small press. It took four months to arrive. I hope you like it."

Gogol leans over toward the stereo to turn the volume down a bit. He would have preferred "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," or even another copy of "The Hobbit" to replace the one he lost last summer in Calcutta, left on the rooftop of his father's house in Alipore and snatched away by crows. In spite of his father's occasional suggestions, he has never been inspired to read a word of Gogol, or of any Russian writer, for that matter. He has never been told why he was really named Gogol. He thinks his father's limp is the consequence of an injury playing soccer in his teens.

"Thanks, Baba," Gogol says, eager to return to his lyrics. Lately he's been lazy, addressing his parents in English, though they continue to speak to him in Bengali. Occasionally he wanders through the house with his running sneakers on. At dinner he sometimes uses a fork.

His father is still standing there in

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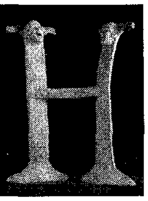

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his room, watching expectantly, his hands clasped together behind his back, so Gogol flips through the book. A single picture at the front, on smoother paper than the rest of the pages, shows a pencil drawing of the author, sporting a velvet jacket, a billowy white shirt, and a cravat. The face is foxlike, with small, dark eyes, a thin, neat mustache, an extremely large pointy nose. Dark hair slants steeply across his forehead and is plastered to either side of his head, and there is a disturbing, vaguely supercilious smile set into long, narrow lips. Gogol Ganguli is relieved to see no resemblance.

For by now he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything "in Indian." He hates having to wear a nametag on his sweater at Model United Nations Day at school. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but, of all things, Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. He hates seeing it on the brown-paper sleeve of the *National Geographic* subscription his parents got him for his birthday the year before, and seeing it perpetually listed in the high honor roll printed in the town's newspaper. At times his name, an entity shapeless and weightless, manages nevertheless to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear. At times he wishes he could disguise it, shorten it somehow, the way the other Indian boy in his school, Jayadev, had got people to call him Jay. But Gogol, already short and catchy, resists mutation. Other boys his age have begun to court girls already, asking them to go to the movies or the pizza parlor, but he cannot imagine saying, "Hi, it's Gogol" under potentially romantic circumstances. He cannot imagine this at all.

From the little he knows about Russian writers, it dismays him that his parents chose the weirdest namesake. Leo or Anton, he could have lived with. Alexander, shortened to Alex, he would have greatly preferred. But Gogol sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity or gravity. What dismays him most is the irrelevance of it all. Gogol, he's been tempted to tell his father on more than one occasion, was his father's favorite author, not his. Then again, it's his own fault. He could have been known, at school at least, as Nikhil. That one day, his first day of kindergarten, which he no longer remembers, could have changed everything.

"Thanks again," Gogol tells his father now. He shuts the cover and swings his legs over the edge of the bed, to put the book away on his shelves. But his father takes the opportunity to sit beside him on the bed. For a moment he rests a hand on Gogol's shoulder. The boy's body, in recent months, has grown tall, nearly as tall as Ashoke's. The childhood pudginess has vanished from his face. The voice has begun to deepen, is slightly husky now. It occurs to Ashoke that he and his son probably wear the same size shoe. In the glow of the bedside lamp, Ashoke notices a scattered down emerging on his son's upper lip. An Adam's apple is prominent on his neck. The pale hands, like Ashima's, are long and thin. He wonders how closely Gogol resembles him at this age. But there are no photographs to document Ashoke's childhood; not until his passport, not until his life in America, does visual documentation exist. On the night table Ashoke sees a can of deodorant, a tube of Clearasil. He lifts the book from where it lies on the bed between them, running a hand protectively over the cover. "I took the liberty of reading it first. It has been many years since I have read these stories. I hope you don't mind."

"No problem," Gogol says.

"I feel a special kinship with Gogol," Ashoke says, "more than with any other writer. Do you know why?"

"You like his stories."

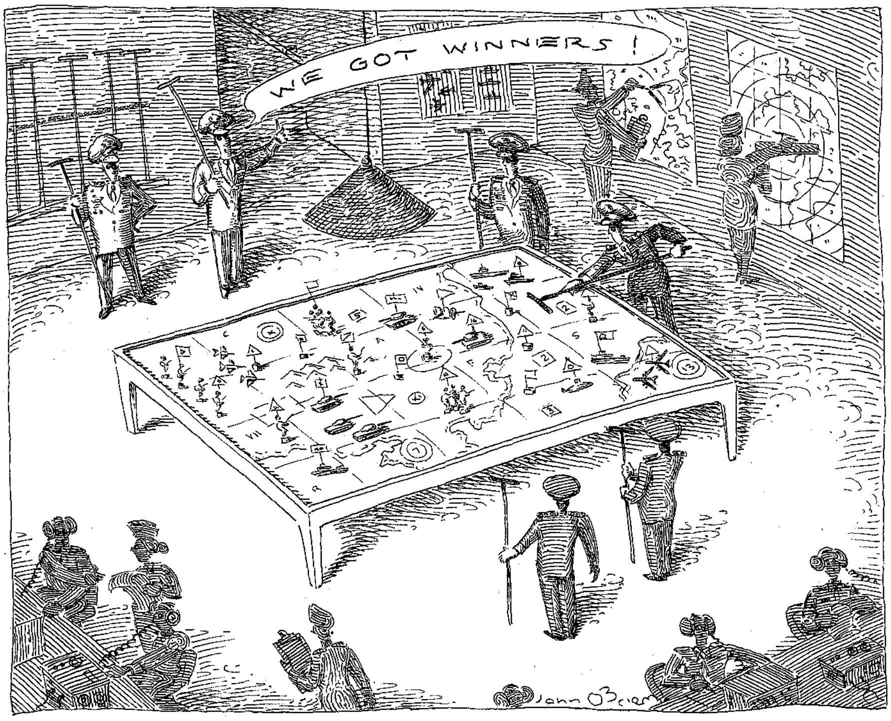
"Apart from that. He spent most of his adult life outside his homeland. Like me."

Gogol nods. "Right."

"And there is another reason." The music ends and there is silence. But then Gogol flips the record, turning the volume up on "Revolution 1."

"What's that?" Gogol says, a bit impatiently.

Ashoke looks around the room. He notices the Lennon obituary pinned to the bulletin board, and then a cassette of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• •

classical Indian music he'd bought for Gogol months ago, after a concert at Kresge, still sealed in its wrapper. He sees the pile of birthday cards scattered on the carpet, and remembers a hot August day fourteen years ago in Cambridge when he held his son for the first time. Ever since that day, the day he became a father, the memory of his accident has receded, diminishing over the years. Though he will never forget that night, it no longer lurks persistently in his mind, stalking him in the same way. Instead, it is affixed firmly to a distant time, to a place far from Pemberton Road. Today, his son's birthday, is a day to honor life, not brushes with death. And so, for now, Ashoke decides to keep the explanation of his son's name to himself.

"No other reason. Good night," he says to Gogol, getting up from the bed. At the door he pauses, turns around. "Do you know what Dostoyevsky once said?"

Gogol shakes his head.

" 'We all came out of Gogol's overcoat.' "

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It will make sense to you one day. Many happy returns of the day."

Gogol gets up and shuts the door behind his father, who has the annoying habit of always leaving it partly open. He turns the lock on the knob for good measure, then wedges the book on a high shelf between two volumes of the Hardy Boys. He settles down again with his lyrics on the bed when something occurs to him. This writer he is named after—Gogol isn't his first name. His first name is Nikolai. Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake.

Plenty of people changed their names: actors, writers, revolutionaries, transvestites. In history class, Gogol has learned that European immigrants had their names changed at Ellis Island, that slaves renamed themselves once they were emancipated. Though Gogol doesn't know it, even Nikolai Gogol renamed himself, simplifying his surname at the age of twenty-two, from Gogol-Yanovsky to Gogol, upon publishing in the *Literary Gazette*.

One day in the summer of 1986, in the frantic weeks before moving away from his family, before his freshman year at Yale is about to begin, Gogol

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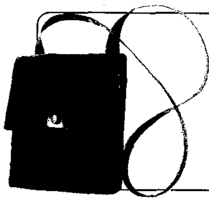
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Ganguli does the same. He rides the commuter rail into Boston, switching to the Green Line at North Station, getting out at Lechmere, the closest stop to the Middlesex Probate and Family Court. He wears a blue oxford shirt, khakis, a camel-colored corduroy blazer bought for his college interviews that is too warm for the sultry day. Knotted around his neck is his only tie, maroon with yellow stripes on the diagonal. By now Gogol is just shy of six feet tall, his body slender, his thick brown-black hair slightly in need of a cut. His face is lean, intelligent, suddenly handsome, the bones more prominent, the pale-gold skin clean-shaven and clear. He has inherited Ashima's eyes—large, penetrating, with bold, elegant brows—and shares with Ashoke the slight bump at the very top of his nose.

The courthouse is an imposing, pillared brick building occupying a full city block, but the entrance is off to the side, down a set of steps. Inside, Gogol empties his pockets and steps through a metal detector, as if he were at an airport, about to embark on a journey. He is soothed by the chill of the air-conditioning, by the beautifully carved plaster ceiling, by the voices that echo pleasantly in the marbled interior. A man at the information booth tells him to wait upstairs, in an area filled with round tables, where people sit eating their lunch. Gogol sits impatiently, one long leg jiggling up and down.

The idea to change his name had first occurred to him a few months ago. He was sitting in the waiting room of his dentist, flipping through an issue of *Reader's Digest.* He'd been turning the pages at random until he came to an article that caused him to stop. The article was called "Second Baptisms." "Can you identify the following famous people?" was written beneath the headline. The only one he guessed correctly was Robert Zimmerman, Bob Dylan's real name. He had no idea that Leon Trotsky was born Lev Davidovich Bronstein. That Gerald Ford's name was Leslie Lynch King, Jr., and that Engelbert Humperdinck's was Arnold George Dorsey. They had all renamed themselves, the article said, adding that it was a right belonging to every American citizen. He read that tens of thousands of Americans, on average, had their names changed each year. All it took was a legal petition.

That night at the dinner table, he brought it up with his parents. It was one thing for Gogol to be the name penned in calligraphy on his high-school diploma, and printed below his picture in the yearbook, he'd begun. But engraved, four years from now, on a bachelor-of-arts degree? Written at the top of a résumé? Centered on a business card? It would be the name his parents picked out for him, he assured them, the good name they'd chosen for him when he was five.

"What's done is done," his father had said. "It will be a hassle. Gogol has, in effect, become your good name."

"It's too complicated now," his mother said, agreeing. "You're too old."

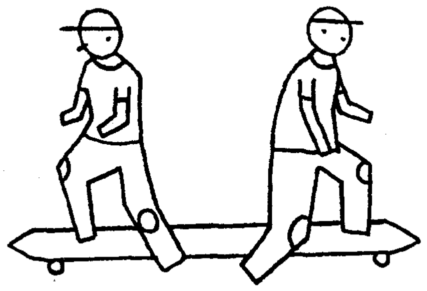
"I'm not," he persisted. "I don't get it. Why did you have to give me a pet name in the first place? What's the point?"

"It's our way, Gogol," his mother maintained. "It's what Bengalis do."

"But it's not even a Bengali name. How could you guys name me after someone so strange? No one takes me seriously."

"Who? Who does not take you seriously?" his father wanted to know, lifting his fingers from his plate, looking up at him. "People," he said, lying to his parents. For his father had a point; the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol.

"I don't know, Gogol," his mother had said, shaking her head. "I really don't know." She got up to clear the dishes. Sonia slinked away, up to her room. Gogol remained at the table with his father. They sat there together, listening to his mother scraping the plates, the water running in the sink.



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"Then change it," his father said simply, quietly, after a while.

"Really?"

"In America anything is possible. Do as you wish."

With relief, he types his name at the top of his freshman papers. He reads the telephone messages his roommates leave for Nikhil on assorted scraps of paper. He opens up a checking account, writes his new name into his course books. "*Me llamo* Nikhil," he says in his Spanish class. It is as Nikhil, that first semester, that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties and, while writing papers and before exams, discovers Brian Eno and Elvis Costello and Charlie Parker. It is as Nikhil that he takes Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend and gets himself a fake I.D. that allows him to be served liquor in New Haven bars. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woollen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights. By the time he wakes up, hung over, at three in the morning, she has vanished from the room, and he is unable to recall her name.

There is only one complication: he doesn't feel like Nikhil. Not yet. Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past. But, after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times he feels as if he'd cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. At times he still feels his old name, painfully and without warning, the way his front tooth had unbearably throbbed in recent weeks after a filling, threatening for an instant to sever from his gums when he drank coffee, or ice water.

Even more startling is when those who normally call him Gogol refer to him as Nikhil. Though he has asked his parents to do precisely this, the fact of it troubles him, making him feel in that instant that he is not related to them, not their child. "Please come visit us with Nikhil one weekend," Ashima says to his roommates when she and Ashoke visit campus during parents' weekend in October, the suite hastily cleared of liquor bottles and ashtrays for the occa-

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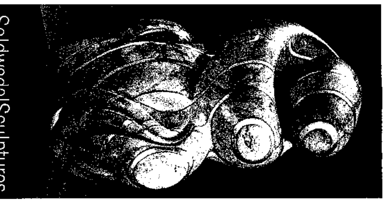


sion. The substitution sounds wrong to Gogol, correct but off key, the way it sounds when his parents speak English to him instead of Bengali.

At Thanksgiving, he takes the train up to Boston. He feels distracted for some reason, impatient to be off the train; he does not bother to remove his coat, does not bother to go to the café car for something to drink even though he is thirsty. His mother and Sonia have gone to India for three weeks, to attend a cousin's wedding, and this year Gogol and his father will spend Thanksgiving at the home of friends.

He angles his head against the window and watches the autumnal landscape pass: the spewing pink and purple waters of a dye mill, electrical power stations, a big ball-shaped water tank covered with rust. Abandoned factories, with rows of small square windows partly bashed in, ravaged as if by moths. On the trees the topmost branches are bare, the remaining leaves yellow, paper-thin. The train moves more slowly than usual, and when he looks at his watch he sees that they are running well behind schedule. And then, somewhere outside Providence, in an abandoned field, the train stops moving. For more than an hour they stand there while a solid, scarlet disk of sun sinks into the tree-lined horizon. The lights turn off, and the air inside the train turns uncomfortably warm. The conductors rush anxiously through the compartments. "Probably a broken wire," the gentleman sitting beside Gogol remarks. Across the aisle a gray-haired woman reads, a coat clutched like a blanket to her chest. Without the sound of the engine Gogol can hear an opera playing faintly on someone's Walkman. Through the window he admires the darkening sapphire sky. He sees spare lengths of rusted rails heaped in piles. It isn't until they start moving again that an announcement is made on the loudspeaker about a medical emergency. But the truth, overheard by one of the passengers from a conductor, quickly circulates: a suicide has been committed, a person has jumped in front of the train.

He is shocked and discomforted by the news, feeling bad about his irritation and impatience, wondering if the victim had been a man or a woman, young or old. He imagines the person consulting the same schedule that's in his backpack, determining exactly when the train would be passing through. As a result of the delay he misses his commuter-rail connection in Boston, waits another forty minutes for the next one. He puts a call through to his parents' house, but no one answers. He tries his father's department at the university, but there, too, the phone rings and rings. At the station he sees his father waiting on the darkened platform, wearing sneakers and corduroys, anxiousness in his face. A trenchcoat is belted around his waist, a scarf knitted by Ashima wrapped at his throat, a tweed cap on his head.

"Sorry I'm late," Gogol says. "How long have you been waiting?"

"Since quarter to six," his father says. Gogol looks at his watch. It is nearly eight.

"There was an accident."

"I know. I called. What happened? Were you hurt?"

Gogol shakes his head. "Someone jumped onto the tracks. Somewhere in Rhode Island. I tried to call you. They had to wait for the police, I think."

"I was worried."

"I hope you haven't been standing out in the cold all this time," Gogol says, and from his father's lack of response he knows that this is exactly what he has done.

The night is windy, so much so that the car jostles slightly from time to time. Normally on these rides back from the station his father asks questions, about his classes, about his finances, about his plans for the future. But tonight they are silent, Ashoke concentrating on driving. Gogol fidgets with the radio.

"I want to tell you something," his father says, once they have already turned onto their road.

"What?" Gogol asks.

"It's about your name."

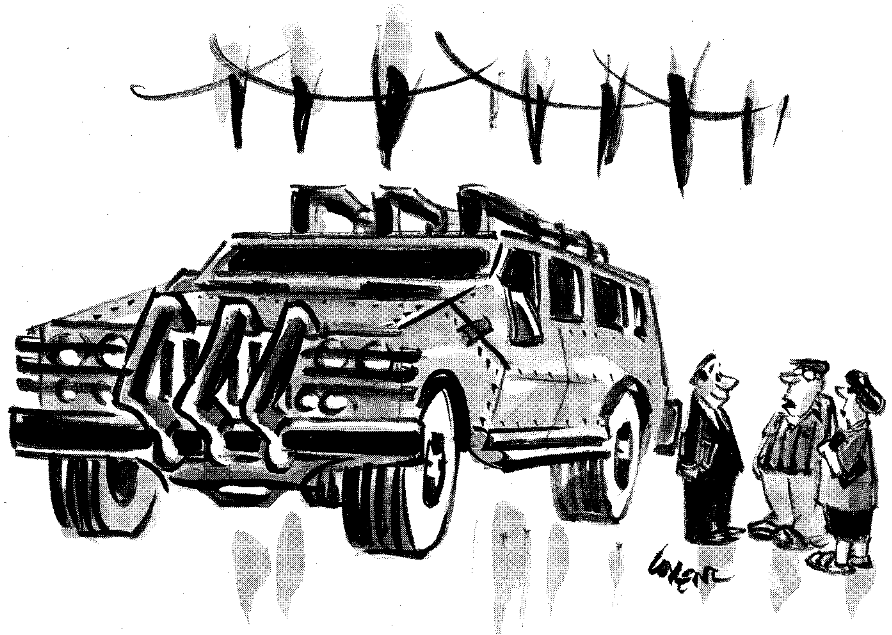
Gogol looks at his father, puzzled. "My name?"

His father shuts off the radio. "Gogol. There is a reason for it, you know."

"Right, Baba. Gogol's your favorite author. I know."

"No," his father says. He pulls in to the driveway and switches off the engine, then the headlights. He undoes his seat belt, guiding it with his hand as it retracts, back behind his left shoulder. "Another reason."

And, as they sit together in the car, his father revisits a field two hundred and nine kilometres from Howrah. With his



"Nice—but my heart's still set on a helicopter gunship."

• •

fingers lightly grasping the bottom of the steering wheel, his gaze directed through the windshield at the garage door, he tells Gogol the story of the train he'd ridden twenty-five years ago, in October, 1961. He tells him about the night that had nearly taken his life, and the book that had saved him, and about the year afterward, when he'd been unable to move.

Gogol listens, stunned, his eyes fixed on his father's profile. Though there are only inches between them, for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way. He imagines his father, a college student as Gogol is now, sitting on a train as Gogol had just been, reading a story, and then suddenly nearly killed. He struggles to picture the West Bengal countryside he has seen on only a few occasions, his father's mangled body, among hundreds of dead ones, being carried on a stretcher, past a twisted length of maroon compartments. Against instinct he tries to imagine life without his father, a world in which his father does not exist.

"Why don't I know this about you?" Gogol says. His voice sounds harsh, accusing, but his eyes well with tears. "Why haven't you told me this until now?"

"It never felt like the right time," his father says.

"But it's like you've lied to me all these years." When his father doesn't respond, he adds, "That's why you have that limp, isn't it?"

"It happened so long ago. I didn't want to upset you."

"It doesn't matter. You should have told me."

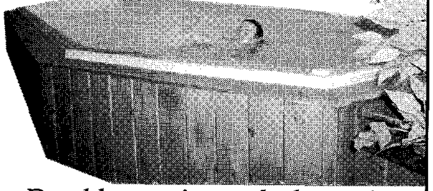
"Perhaps," his father concedes, glancing briefly in Gogol's direction. He removes the keys from the ignition. "Come, you must be hungry. The car is getting cold."

But Gogol doesn't move. He sits there, still struggling to absorb the information, feeling awkward, oddly ashamed, at fault. "I'm sorry, Baba."

His father laughs softly. "You had nothing to do with it, Gogol."

And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. "Is that what you think of when you think of me?" Gogol asks him. "Do I remind you of that night?"

"Not at all," his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. "You remind me of everything that followed." ♦



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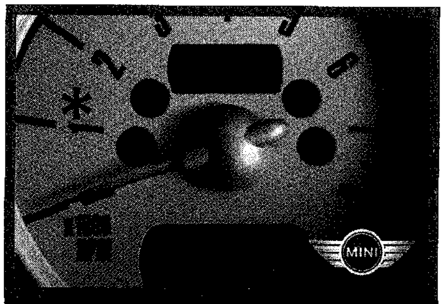

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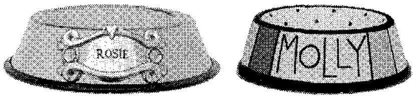

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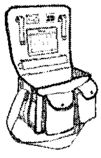

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The making of a writer.

BY CYNTHIA OZICK

Suspicion stalks fame; incredulity stalks great fame. At least three times—at the ages of eleven, twenty-three, and fifty-two—Helen Keller was assaulted by accusation, doubt, and overt disbelief. She was the butt of skeptics and the cynosure of idolaters. Mark Twain compared her to Joan of Arc, and pronounced her "fellow to Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Homer, Shakespeare and the rest of the immortals." Her renown, he said, would endure a thousand years.

It has, so far, lasted more than a hundred, while steadily dimming. Fifty years ago, even twenty, nearly every ten-year-old knew who Helen Keller was. "The Story of My Life," her youthful autobiography, was on the reading lists of most schools, and its author was popularly understood to be a heroine of uncommon grace and courage, a sort of worldly saint. Much of that worshipfulness has receded. No one nowadays, without intending satire, would place her alongside Caesar and Napoleon; and, in an era of earnest disabilities legislation, who would think to charge a stone-blind, stone-deaf woman with faking her experience?

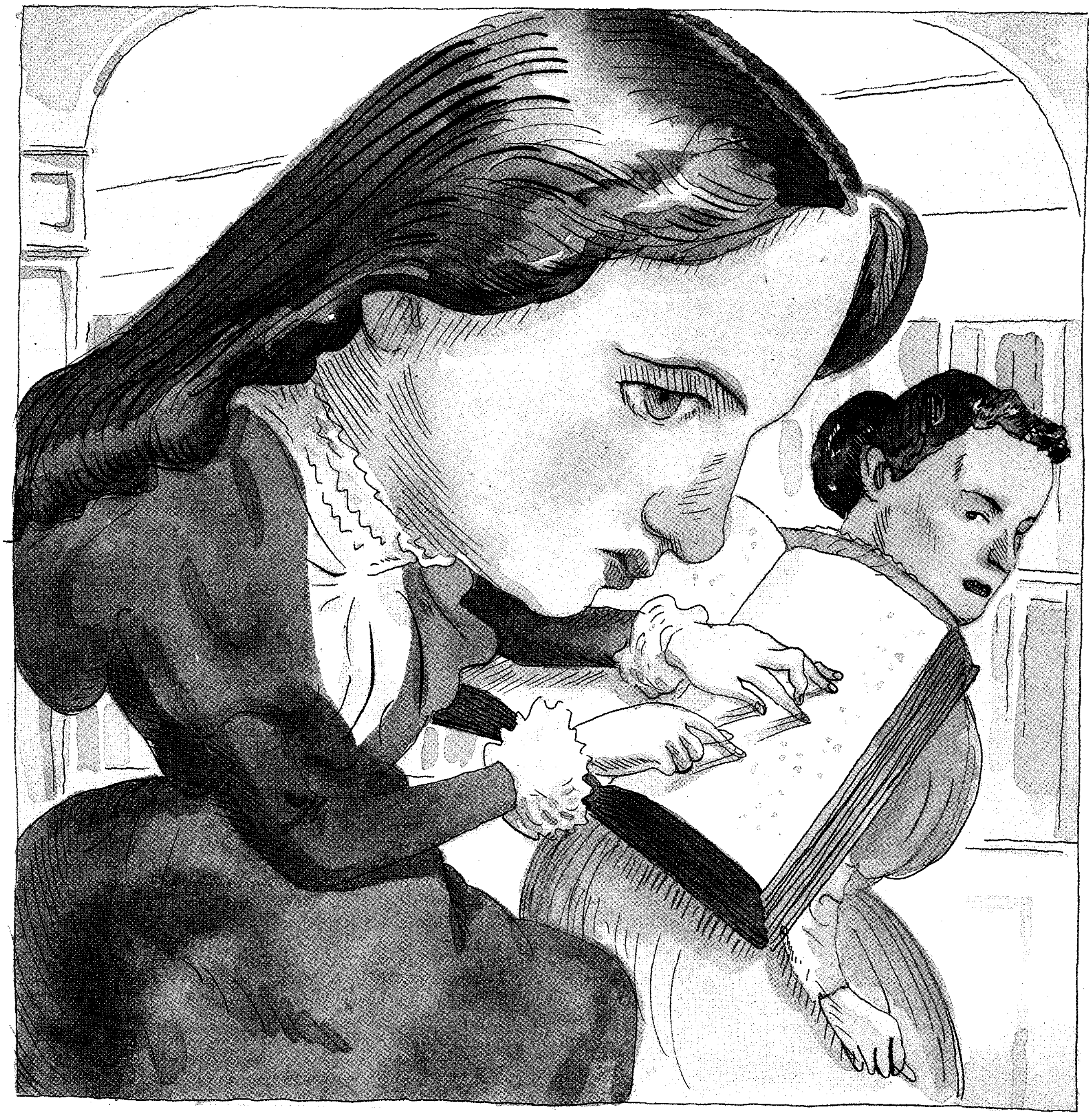
Yet as a child she was accused of plagiarism, and in maturity of "verbalism"—substituting parroted words for firsthand perception. All this came about because she was at once liberated by language and in bondage to it, in a way few other human beings can fathom. The merely blind have the window of their ears, the merely deaf listen through their eyes. For Helen Keller there was no ameliorating "merely"; what she suffered was a totality of exclusion. The illness that annihilated her sight and hearing, and left her mute, has never been diagnosed. In 1882, when she was four months short of two years, medical knowledge could assert only "acute congestion of the stomach and brain," though later speculation proposes meningitis or scarlet fever. Whatever the cause, the consequence was ferocity—tantrums, kicking, rages—but also an invented system of sixty simple signs, intimations of intelligence. The child could mimic what she could neither see nor hear: putting on a hat before a mirror, her father reading a newspaper with his glasses on. She could fold laundry and pick out her own things. Such quiet times were few. Having discovered the use of a key, she shut up her mother in a closet. She overturned her baby sister's cradle. Her wants were physical, impatient, helpless, and nearly always belligerent.

She was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, fifteen years after the Civil War, when Confederate consciousness was still inflamed. Her father, who had fought at Vicksburg, called himself a "gentleman farmer," and edited a small Democratic weekly until, thanks to political influence, he was appointed a United States marshal. He was a zealous hunter who loved his guns and his dogs. Money was usually short; there were escalating marital angers. His second wife, Helen's mother, was younger by twenty years, a spirited woman of intellect condemned to farmhouse toil. She had a strong literary side (Edward Everett Hale, the New Englander who wrote "The Man Without a Country," was a relative) and read seriously and searchingly. In Charles Dickens's "American Notes," she learned about Laura Bridgman, a deaf-blind country girl who was being educated at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, in Boston. Ravaged by scarlet fever at the age of two, she was even more circumscribed than Helen Keller—she could neither smell nor taste. She was confined, Dickens said, "in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound," lost to language beyond a handful of words unidiomatically strung together.

News of Laura Bridgman ignited hope—she had been socialized into a semblance of personhood, while Helen remained a small savage—and hope led, eventually, to Alexander Graham Bell. By then, the invention of the telephone was well behind him, and he was tenaciously committed to teaching the deaf to speak intelligibly. His wife was deaf; his mother had been deaf. When the six-year-old Helen was brought to him, he took her on his lap and instantly calmed her by letting her feel the vibrations of his pocket watch as it struck the hour. Her responsiveness did not register in her face; he described it as "chillingly empty." But he judged her educable, and advised her father to apply to Michael Anagnos, the director of the Perkins Institution, for a teacher to be sent to Tuscumbia.

Anagnos chose Anne Mansfield Sullivan, a former student at Perkins. "Mansfield" was her own embellishment; it had the sound of gentility. If the fabricated name was intended to confer an elevated status, it was because Annie Sullivan, born into penury, had no status at all. At five, she contracted trachoma, a disease of the eye. Three years on, her mother died of tuberculosis and was buried in potter's field—after which her father, a drunkard prone to beating his children, deserted the family. The half-blind Annie was tossed into the poorhouse at Tewksbury, Massachusetts, among syphilitic prostitutes and madmen. Decades later, recalling its "strangeness, grotesqueness and even terribleness," Annie Sullivan wrote, "I doubt if life or for that matter eternity is long enough to erase the terrors and ugly blots scored upon my mind during those dismal years from 8 to 14."

She was rescued from Tewksbury by a committee investigating its spreading



When Helen was eleven, she was accused of fraudulence—of being a "living lie." Such charges would recur throughout her life.

BARRY BLITT

notoriety, and was mercifully transferred to Perkins. She learned Braille and the manual alphabet—finger positions representing letters—and, at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, underwent two operations, which enabled her to read almost normally, though the condition of her eyes was fragile and inconsistent over her lifetime. After six years, she graduated from Perkins as class valedictorian. But what was to become of her? How was she to earn a living? Someone suggested that she might wash dishes or peddle needlework. "Sewing and crocheting are inventions of the devil," she sneered. "I'd rather break stones on the king's highway than hem a handkerchief."

She went to Tuscumbia instead. She was twenty years old and had no experience suitable for what she would encounter in the despairs and chaotic defeats of the Keller household. The child she had come to educate threw cutlery, pinched, grabbed food off dinner plates, sent chairs tumbling, shrieked, struggled. She was strong, beautiful but for one protruding eye, unsmiling, painfully untamed: virtually her first act on meeting the new teacher was to knock out one of her front teeth. The afflictions of the marble cell had become inflictions. Annie demanded that Helen be separated from her family; her father could not bear to see his ruined little daughter disciplined. The teacher and her recalcitrant pupil retreated to a cottage on the grounds of the main house, where Annie was to be the sole authority.

What happened then and afterward she chronicled in letter after letter, to Anagnos and, more confidingly, to Mrs. Sophia Hopkins, the Perkins

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housemother who had given her shelter during school vacations. Mark Twain saw in Annie Sullivan a *writer:* "How she stands out in her letters!" he exclaimed. "Her brilliancy, penetration, originality, wisdom, character and the fine literary competencies of her pen—they are all there." Jubilantly, she set down the progress, almost hour by hour, of an exuberant deliverance far more remarkable than Laura Bridgman's frail and inarticulate release. Annie Sullivan's method, insofar as she recognized it formally as a method, was pure freedom. Like any writer, she wrote and wrote and wrote, all day long: words, phrases, sentences, lines of poetry, descriptions of animals, trees, flowers, weather, skies, clouds, concepts—whatever lay before her or came usefully to mind. She wrote not on paper with a pen but with her fingers, spelling rapidly into the child's alert palm. Mimicking unknowable configurations, Helen spelled the same letters back—but not until a connection was effected between finger-wriggling and its referent did mind break free.

This was, of course, the fabled incident at the well pump, when Helen suddenly understood that the pecking at her hand was inescapably related to the gush of cold water spilling over it. "Somehow," the adult Helen Keller recollected, "the mystery of language was revealed to me." In the course of a single month, from Annie's arrival to her triumph in bridling the household despot, Helen had grown docile, affectionate, and tirelessly intent on learning from moment to moment. Her intellect was fiercely engaged, and when language began to flood it she rode on a salvational ark of words.

To Mrs. Hopkins, Annie wrote ecstatically:

> Something within me tells me that I shall succeed beyond my dreams. . . . I know that [Helen] has remarkable powers, and I believe that I shall be able to develop and mould them. I cannot tell how I know these things. I had no idea a short time ago how to go to work; I was feeling about in the dark; but somehow I know now, and I know that I know. I cannot explain it; but when difficulties arise, I am not perplexed or doubtful. I know how to meet them; I seem to divine Helen's peculiar needs. . . .
>
> Already people are taking a deep interest in Helen. No one can see her without being impressed. She is no ordinary child, and people's interest in her education will be no ordinary interest. Therefore let us be exceedingly careful in what we say and write about her. . . . My beautiful Helen shall not be transformed into a prodigy if I can help it.

At this time, Helen was not yet seven years old, and Annie was being paid twenty-five dollars a month.

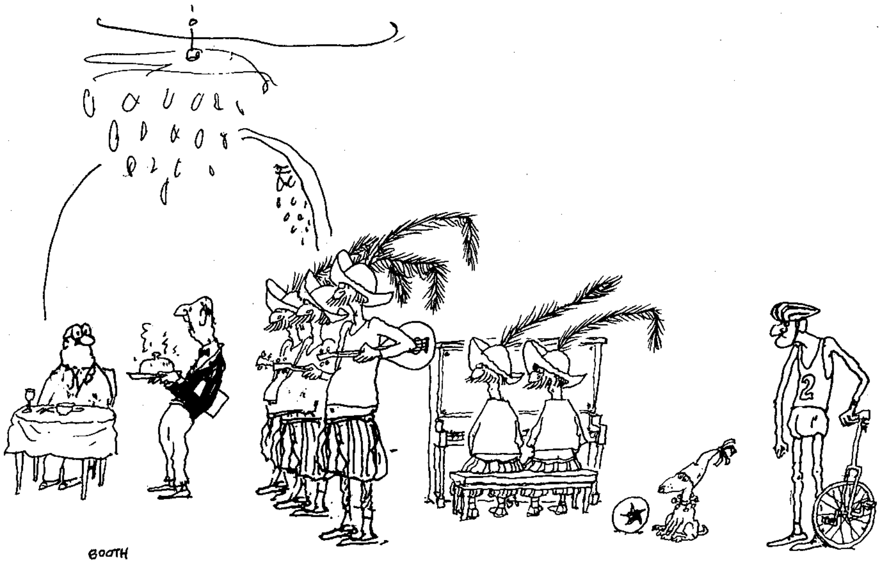
The public scrutiny Helen Keller aroused far exceeded Annie's predictions. It was Michael Anagnos who first proclaimed her to be a miracle child—a young goddess. "History presents no case like hers," he exulted. "As soon as a slight crevice was opened in the outer wall of their twofold imprisonment, her mental faculties emerged full-armed from their living tomb as Pallas Athene from the head of Zeus." And again: "She is the queen of precocious and brilliant children, Emersonian in temper, most exquisitely organized, with intellectual sight of unsurpassed sharpness and infinite reach, a true daughter of Mnemosyne." Annie, the teacher of a flesh-and-blood child, protested: "His extravagant way of saying [these things] rubs me the wrong way. The simple facts would be so much more convincing!" But Anagnos's glorifications caught fire: one year after Annie had begun spelling into her hand, Helen Keller was celebrated in newspapers all over America and Europe. When her dog was inadvertently shot, an avalanche of contributions poured in to replace it; unprompted, she directed that the money be set aside for the care of an impoverished deaf-blind boy at Perkins. At eight, she was taken to visit President Cleveland at the White House, and in Boston was introduced to many of the luminaries of the period: Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, Edward Everett Hale, and Bishop Phillips Brooks (who addressed her puzzlement over the nature of God). At nine, she wrote to Whittier, saluting him as "Dear Poet":

> I thought you would be glad to hear that your beautiful poems make me very happy. Yesterday I read "In School Days" and "My Playmate," and I enjoyed them greatly. . . . It is very pleasant to live here in our beautiful world. I cannot see the lovely things with my eyes, but my mind can see them all, and so I am joyful all the day long.
>
> When I walk out in my garden I cannot see the beautiful flowers, but I know that they are all around me; for is not the air sweet with their fragrance? I know too that the tiny lily-bells are whispering pretty secrets to their companions else they would not look so happy. I love you very dearly, because you have taught me so many lovely things about flowers and birds, and people.

Her dependence on Annie for the assimilation of her immediate surroundings was nearly total, but through the raised letters of Braille she could be altogether untethered: books coursed through her. In childhood, she was captivated by "Little Lord Fauntleroy," Frances Hodgson Burnett's story of a sunnily virtuous boy who melts a crusty old man's heart; it became a secret template of her own character as she hoped she might always manifest it—not sentimentally but in full awareness of dread. She was not deaf to Caliban's wounded cry: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse." Helen Keller's profit was that she knew how to rejoice. In young adulthood, she seized on Swedenborgian spiritualism. Annie had kept away from teaching any religion at all: she was a down-to-earth agnostic whom Tewksbury had cured of easy belief. When Helen's responsiveness to bitter social deprivation later took on a worldly strength, leading her to socialism, and even to unpopular Bolshevik sympathies, Annie would have no part of it, and worried that Helen had gone too far. Marx was not in Annie's canon. Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, and Milton were: she had Helen reading "Paradise Lost" at twelve.

But Helen's formal schooling was widening beyond Annie's tutelage. With her teacher at her side—and the financial support of such patrons as John Spaulding, the Sugar King, and Henry Rogers, of Standard Oil—Helen spent a year at Perkins, and then entered the Wright-Humason School, in New York, a fashionable academy for deaf girls; she was its single deaf-blind pupil. She was also determined to learn to speak like other people, but her efforts could not be readily understood. Speech was not her only ambition: she intended to go to college. To prepare, she enrolled in the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, where she studied mathematics, German, French, Latin, and Greek and Roman history. In 1900, she was admitted to Radcliffe (then an "annex" to Harvard), still with Annie in attendance. Despite Annie's presence in every class, diligently spelling the lecture into Helen's hand, and wearing out her troubled eyes as she transcribed text after text into the manual alphabet, no one thought of granting her a degree along with Helen: the radiant miracle outshone the driven miracle worker. It was not uncommon for Annie Sullivan to play second fiddle to Helen Keller, or to be charged with being Helen's jailer, or harrier, or ventriloquist. During examinations at Radcliffe, Annie was not permitted to be in the building. Otherwise, Helen relied on her own extraordinary memory and on Annie's lightning fingers. Luckily, a second helper soon turned up: he was John Macy, a twenty-five-year-old English instructor at Harvard, a writer and editor, a fervent socialist, and, eventually, Annie Sullivan's husband, eleven years her junior.

At Radcliffe, Helen became a writer. Charles Townsend Copeland—Harvard's illustrious Copey, a professor of rhetoric—had encouraged her (as she put it to him in a grateful letter) "to make



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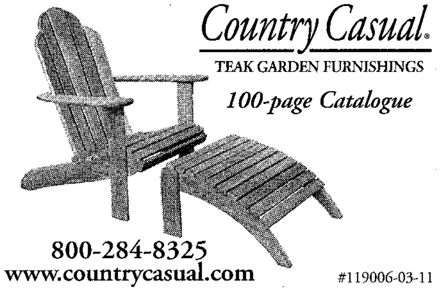
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my own observations and describe the experiences peculiarly my own. Henceforth I am resolved to be myself, to live my own life and write my own thoughts." Out of this came "The Story of My Life," the autobiography of a twenty-one-year-old, published while she was still an undergraduate. It began as a series of sketches for the *Ladies' Home Journal;* the fee was three thousand dollars. John Macy described the laborious process:

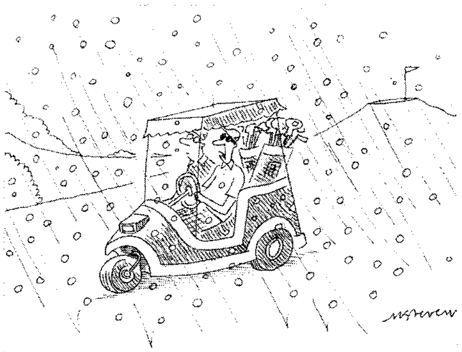
> When she began work at her story, more than a year ago, she set up on the Braille machine about a hundred pages of what she called "material," consisting of detached episodes and notes put down as they came to her without definite order or coherent plan. . . . Then came the task where one who has eyes to see must help her. Miss Sullivan and I read the disconnected passages, put them into chronological order, and counted the words to be sure the articles should be the right length. All this work we did with Miss Keller beside us, referring everything, especially matters of phrasing, to her for revision. . . .
>
> Her memory of what she had written was astonishing. She remembered whole passages, some of which she had not seen for many weeks, and could tell, before Miss Sullivan had spelled into her hand a half-dozen words of the paragraphs under discussion, where they belonged and what sentences were necessary to make the connections clear.

This method of collaboration continued throughout Helen Keller's professional writing life; yet within these constraints the design and the sensibility were her own. She was a self-conscious stylist. Macy remarked that she had the courage of her metaphors—he meant that she sometimes let them carry her away—and Helen herself worried that her prose could now and then seem "periwigged." To the contemporary ear, there is too much Victorian lace and striving uplift in her cadences; but the contemporary ear is scarcely entitled, simply by being contemporary, to set itself up as judge—every period is marked by a prevailing voice. Helen Keller's earnestness is a kind of piety. It is as if Tennyson and the transcendentalists had together got hold of her typewriter. At the same time, she is embroiled in the whole range of human perplexity—except, tellingly, for irony. She has no "edge," and why should she? Irony is a radar that seeks out the dark side; she had darkness enough. She rarely knew what part of her mind was instinct and what part was information, and she was cautious about the difference. "It is certain," she wrote, "that I cannot always distinguish my own thoughts from those I read, because what I read becomes the very substance and texture of my mind. . . . It seems to me that the great difficulty of writing is to make the language of the educated mind express our confused ideas, half feelings, half thoughts, where we are little more than bundles of instinctive tendencies." She who had once been incarcerated in the id did not require Freud to instruct her in its inchoate presence.

"The Story of My Life," first published in 1903, is being honored in its centenary year by two new reissues, one from the Modern Library, edited and with a preface by James Berger, and the other from W. W. Norton, edited by Roger Shattuck with Dorothy Herrmann; Shattuck also supplies a thoughtful foreword and afterword. Much else accompanies the Keller text: Macy's ample contribution to the original edition, as well as Annie's indelible reports and Helen's increasingly impressive letters from childhood on. All these elements together make up at least a partial biography, though they do not take us into Helen Keller's astonishing future as world traveller and energetic advocate for the blind. (Two full biographies, "Helen Keller: A Life," by Dorothy Herrmann, and "Helen and Teacher," by Joseph P. Lash, flesh out her long and active life.) Macy was able to write about Helen nearly as authoritatively as Annie, but also (in private) more skeptically: after his marriage, the three of them, a feverishly literary crew, set up housekeeping in rural Wrentham, Massachusetts. Macy soon discovered that he had married not just a woman, and a moody one at that, but the infrastructure of a public institution. As Helen's secondary amanuensis, he continued to be of use until the marriage foundered—on his profligacy with money, on Annie's irritability (she scorned his uncompromising socialism), and, finally, on his accelerating alcoholism.

Because Macy was known to have assisted Helen in the preparation of "The Story of My Life," the insinuations of control that often assailed Annie landed on him. Helen's ideas, it was suggested, were really Macy's; he had transformed her into a "Marxist propagandist." It was true that she sympathized with his political bent, but she had arrived at her views

ON THE TOWN



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independently. The charge of expropriation, of both thought and idiom, was old, and dogged her at intervals during her early and middle years: she was a fraud, a puppet, a plagiarist. She was false coin. She was "a living lie."

Helen Keller was eleven when these words were first hurled at her by an infuriated Michael Anagnos. What brought on this defection was a little story she had written, called "The Frost King," which she sent him as a birthday present. In the voice of a highly literary children's narrative, it recounts how the "frost fairies" cause the season's turning:

> When the children saw the trees all aglow with brilliant colors they clapped their hands and shouted for joy, and immediately began to pick great bunches to take home. "The leaves are as lovely as the flowers!" cried they, in their delight.

Anagnos—doubtless clapping his hands and shouting for joy—immediately began to publicize Helen's newest accomplishment. "The Frost King" appeared both in the Perkins alumni magazine and in another journal for the blind, which, following Anagnos, unhesitatingly named it "without parallel in the history of literature." But more than a parallel was at stake; the story was found to be nearly identical to "The Frost Fairies," by Margaret Canby, a writer of children's books. Anagnos was humiliated, and fled headlong from adulation to excoriation. Feeling personally betrayed and institutionally discredited, he arranged an inquisition for the terrified Helen, standing her alone in a room before a jury of eight Perkins officials and himself, all mercilessly cross-examining her. Her mature recollection of Anagnos's "court of investigation" registers as pitiably as the ordeal itself:

> Mr. Anagnos, who loved me tenderly, thinking that he had been deceived, turned a deaf ear to the pleadings of love and innocence. He believed, or at least suspected, that Miss Sullivan and I had deliberately stolen the bright thoughts of another and imposed them on him to win his admiration. . . . As I lay in my bed that night, I wept as I hope few children have wept. I felt so cold, I imagined I should die before morning, and the thought comforted me. I think if this sorrow had come to me when I was older, it would have broken my spirit beyond repairing.

She was defended by Alexander Graham Bell, and by Mark Twain, who parodied the whole procedure with a

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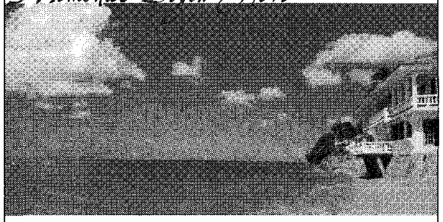

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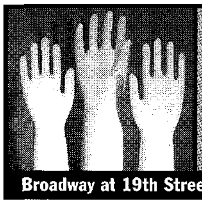

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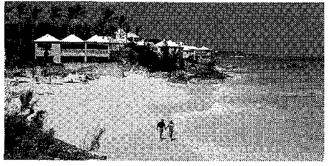

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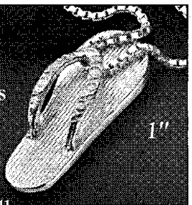

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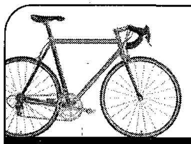

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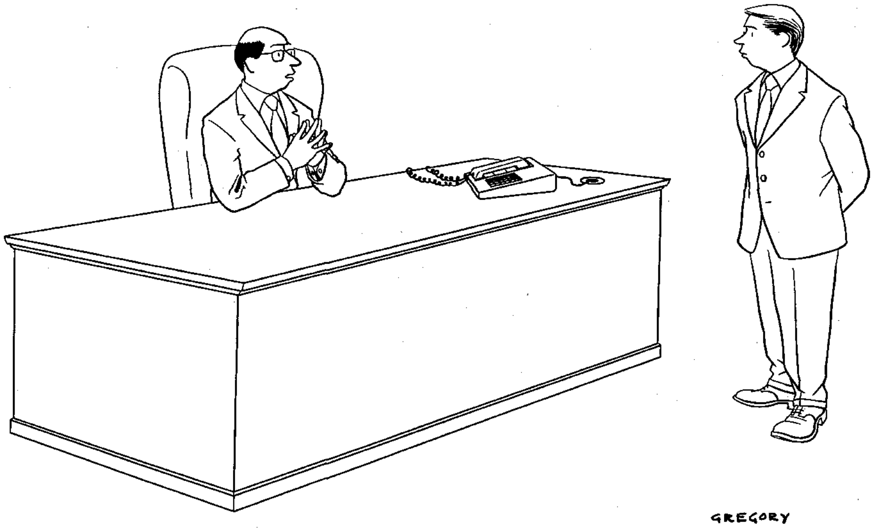

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thumping hurrah for plagiarism, and disgust for the egotism of "these solemn donkeys breaking a little child's heart with their ignorant damned rubbish! . . . A gang of dull and hoary pirates piously setting themselves the task of disciplining and purifying a kitten that they think they've caught filching a chop!" Margaret Canby's tale had been spelled to Helen perhaps three years before, and lay dormant in her prodigiously retentive memory; she was entirely oblivious of reproducing phrases not her own. The scandal Anagnos had precipitated left a lasting bruise. But it was also the beginning of a psychological, even a metaphysical, clarification that Helen refined and ratified as she grew older, when similar, if subtler, suspicions cropped up in the press. "The Story of My Life" was attacked in *The Nation* not for plagiarism in the usual sense but for the purloining of "things beyond her powers of perception with the assurance of one who has verified every word. . . . One resents the pages of second-hand description of natural objects." The reviewer blamed her for the sin of vicariousness. "All her knowledge," he insisted, "is hearsay knowledge."

It was almost a reprise of the Perkins tribunal: she was again being confronted with the charge of inauthenticity. Anagnos's rebuke—"Helen Keller is a living lie"—regularly resurfaced, in the form of a neurologist's or a psychologist's assessment, or in the reservations of reviewers. A French professor of literature, who was himself blind, determined that she was "a dupe of words, and her aesthetic enjoyment of most of the arts is a matter of auto-suggestion rather than perception." A *New Yorker* interviewer complained, "She talks bookishly. . . . To express her ideas, she falls back on the phrases she has learned from books, and uses words that sound stilted, poetical metaphors."

But the cruellest appraisal of all came, in 1933, from Thomas Cutsforth, a blind psychologist. By this time, Helen was fifty-two, and had published four additional autobiographical volumes. Cutsforth disparaged everything she had become. The wordless child she once was, he maintained, was closer to reality than what her teacher had made of her through the imposition of "word-mindedness." He objected to her use of images such as "a mist of green," "blue pools of dog violets," "soft clouds tumbling." All that, he protested, was "implied chicanery" and "a birthright sold for a mess of verbiage." He criticized

> the aims of the educational system in which [Helen Keller] has been confined during her whole life. Literary expression has been the goal of her formal education. Fine writing, regardless of its meaningful content, has been the end toward which both she and her teacher have striven. . . . Her own experiential life was rapidly made secondary, and it was regarded as such by the victim. . . . Her teacher's ideals became her ideals, her teacher's likes became her likes, and whatever emotional activity her teacher experienced she experienced.

For Cutsforth—and not only for him—she was the victim of language rather than its victorious master. She was no better than a copy; whatever was primary, and thereby genuine, had been stamped out. As for Annie, while here she was pilloried as her pupil's victimizer, elsewhere she was pitied as a woman cheated of her own life by having sacrificed it to serve another. Either Helen was Annie's slave or Annie was Helen's.

Helen knew what she saw. Once, having been taken to the uppermost viewing platform of what was then the tallest building in the world, she defined her condition:

> I will concede that my guides saw a thousand things that escaped me from the top of the Empire State Building, but I am not envious. For imagination creates distances that reach to the end of the world. . . . There was the Hudson—more like the flash of a swordblade than a noble river. The little island of Manhattan, set like a jewel in its nest of rainbow waters, stared up into my face, and the solar system circled about my head!

Her rebuttal to word-mindedness, to vicariousness, to implied chicanery and the living lie, was inscribed deliberately and defiantly in her images of "swordblade" and "rainbow waters." The deaf-blind person, she wrote, "seizes every word of sight and hearing, because his sensations compel it. Light and color, of which he has no tactual evidence, he studies fearlessly, believing that all humanly knowable truth is open to him." She was not ashamed of talking bookishly: it meant a ready access to the storehouse of history and literature. She disposed of her critics with a dazzling apothegm—"The bulk of the world's knowledge is an imaginary construction"—and went on to contend that history itself "is but a mode of imagining, of making us see civilizations that no longer appear upon the earth." Those who ridiculed her rendering of color she dismissed as "spirit-vandals" who would force her "to bite the dust of material things." Her idea of the subjective onlooker was broader than that of physics, and while "red" may denote an explicit and measurable wavelength in the visible spectrum, in the mind it varies from the bluster of rage to the reticence of a blush: physics cannot cage metaphor.

She saw, then, what she wished, or was blessed, to see, and rightly named it imagination. In this she belongs to a

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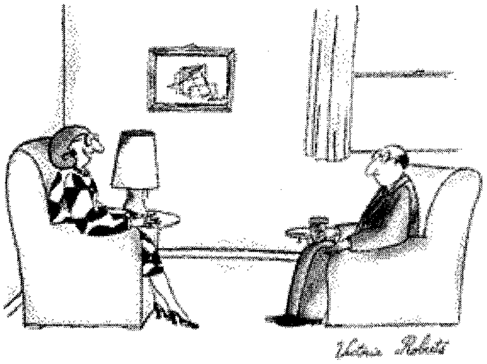

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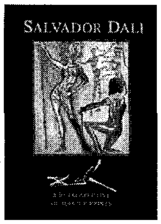

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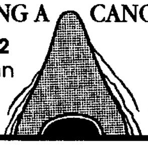

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broader class than that narrow order of the deaf-blind. Her class, her tribe, hears what no healthy ear can catch and sees what no eye chart can quantify. Her common language was not with the man who crushed a child for memorizing what the fairies do, or with the carpers who scolded her for the crime of a literary vocabulary. She was a member of the race of poets, the Romantic kind; she was close cousin to those novelists who write not only what they do not know but what they cannot possibly know.

And though she was early taken in hand by a writerly intelligence, it was hardly in the power of the manual alphabet to pry out a writer who was not already there. Laura Bridgman stuck to her lacemaking, and with all her senses intact might have remained a needlewoman. John Macy believed finally that between Helen and Annie there was only one genius—his wife. In the absence of Annie's inventiveness and direction, he implied, Helen's efforts would show up as the lesser gifts they were. This did not happen. Annie died, at seventy, in 1936, four years after Macy; they had long been estranged. Depressed, obese, cranky, and inconsolable, she had herself gone blind. Helen came under the care of her secretary, Polly Thomson, a loyal but unliterary Scotswoman: the scenes she spelled into Helen's hand never matched Annie's quicksilver evocations.

Even as Helen mourned the loss of her teacher, she flourished. With the assistance of Nella Henney, Annie Sullivan's biographer, she continued to publish journals and memoirs. She undertook gruelling visits to Japan, India, Israel, Europe, Australia, everywhere championing the disabled and the dispossessed. She was indefatigable until her very last years, and died in 1968, weeks before her eighty-eighth birthday.

Yet the story of her life is not the good she did, the panegyrics she inspired, or the disputes (genuine or counterfeit? victim or victimizer?) that stormed around her. The most persuasive story of Helen Keller's life is what she said it was: "I observe, I feel, I think, I imagine." She was an artist. She imagined.

"Blindness has no limiting effect upon mental vision," she argued again and again. "My intellectual horizon is infinitely wide. The universe it encircles is immeasurable." And, like any writer making imagination's mysterious claims before the material-minded, she had cause to cry out, "Oh, the supercilious doubters!"

Nevertheless, she was a warrior in a vaster and more vexing conflict. Do we know only what we see, or do we see what we somehow already know? Are we more than the sum of our senses? Does a picture—whatever strikes the retina—engender thought, or does thought create the picture? Can there be subjectivity without an object to glance off? Theorists have their differing notions, to which the ungraspable organism that is Helen Keller is a retort. She is not an advocate for one side or the other in the ancient debate concerning the nature of the real. She is not a philosophical or neurological or therapeutic topic. She stands for enigma; there lurks in her still the angry child who demanded to be understood yet could not be deciphered. She refutes those who cannot perceive, or do not care to value, what is hidden from sensation: collective memory, heritage, literature.

Helen Keller's lot, it turns out, was not unique. "We work in the dark," Henry James affirmed, on behalf of his own art; and so did she. It was the same dark. She knew her Wordsworth: "Visionary power / Attends the motions of the viewless winds, / Embodied in the mystery of words: / There, darkness makes abode." She vivified Keats's phantom theme of negative capability, the poet's oarless casting about for the hallucinatory shadows of desire. She fought the debunkers who, for the sake of a spurious honesty, would denude her of landscape and return her to the marble cell. She fought the literalists who took imagination for mendacity, who meant to disinherit her, and everyone, of poetry. Her legacy, after all, is an epistemological marker of sorts: proof of the real existence of the mind's eye.

In one respect, though, she was as fraudulent as the cynics charged. She had always been photographed in profile; this hid her disfigured left eye. In maturity, she had both eyes surgically removed and replaced with glass—an expedient known only to her intimates. Everywhere she went, her sparkling blue prosthetic eyes were admired for their living beauty and humane depth. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

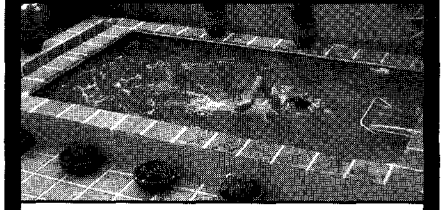
First Novels

Liars and Saints, *by Maile Meloy (Scribner; $24).* How much calamity can you pack into two hundred and sixty pages? Teen-age pregnancy, murder, and terminal cancer are just some of the things the Santerres, a Catholic family in California, have to deal with. But Meloy manages to avoid melodrama through the precision and restraint of her writing. Ranging over four generations, she identifies and isolates the points at which relationships start to fracture, and shows the tentative attempts, often years later, at repair. She is also a deft sociologist, charting the ways in which the social upheavals of the second half of the twentieth century have gradually reshaped our ideas of family. A central concern here is the nature of belief, and the tightly controlled narrative does not always leave enough room for the larger question to resonate. Still, in an era of bulked-up novels, Meloy's achievement is to have written one that leaves you wishing it were longer.

The Book Against God, *by James Wood (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* Thomas Bunting, the narrator of this slyly comic novel, is trying and failing to finish a Ph.D in philosophy. He spends most days in his pajamas, avoiding any task—bill-paying, dishwashing—that evokes the "one long liegedom" of adulthood. It is no surprise (except to him) that his marriage is coming undone. Neglecting his moribund dissertation, he labors instead on a secret refutation of religion called the "Book Against God," a work that draws a personal animus from the fact that his own father is an Anglican clergyman. The novel's theological conundrums, allusive as they are, never feel merely academic, for they are refractions of Thomas's personal relationships. When his father's health starts to fail, Thomas must return home and confront the consolations—his father's temperate, generous faith, his parents' happy marriage—that so confound him.

The Dogs of Babel, *by Carolyn Parkhurst (Little, Brown; $21.95).* The premise is simple, if strange. Paul, a linguistics professor, comes home from work to discover that his wife has fallen fatally from their back-yard apple tree. The only witness to the event is the family dog, Lorelei. Desperate to find out whether his wife's death was suicide or accident, Paul does what any linguistics professor would do: he sets about teaching the dog to talk so that she can tell him what happened. In between accounts of talking-dog experiments, we get flashbacks to Paul's blissful married life. His wife, a mask-maker who played whimsical trickster to his strait-laced academic, occasionally dabbled in the occult, and this gives Parkhurst the opportunity to write about tarot readings, spooky masks, and dream journals. But the mysticism, though ably rendered, gets tedious, while Parkhurst rushes through the experiments with the dog—the peg from which the book hangs—developing neither verisimilitude nor artful absurdity.

Important Things That Don't Matter, *by David Amsden (Morrow; $24.95).* In this fictional report from the strip-mall frontlines of Generation Y (or are we on to Z?), Amsden's twenty-year-old narrator offers a selective account of his life and loves in dull, suburban Maryland. His parents are divorced, and his father is an intermittent, largely pathetic presence. Nonetheless, the encounters with this hapless parent are the touchstones of the young man's memory. Another abiding obsession is the landscape around him, the overnight subdivisions and the cyclical shopping centers, of which he says, "Whoever designed them knew that families would spend their lifetimes in these parking lots, going in and out of these stores, and wanted to create a building so fantastically boring that no one noticed it was really there."



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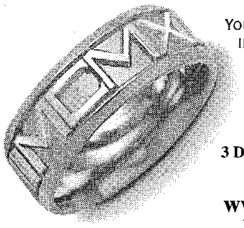

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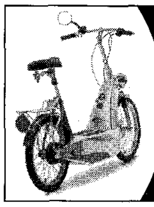

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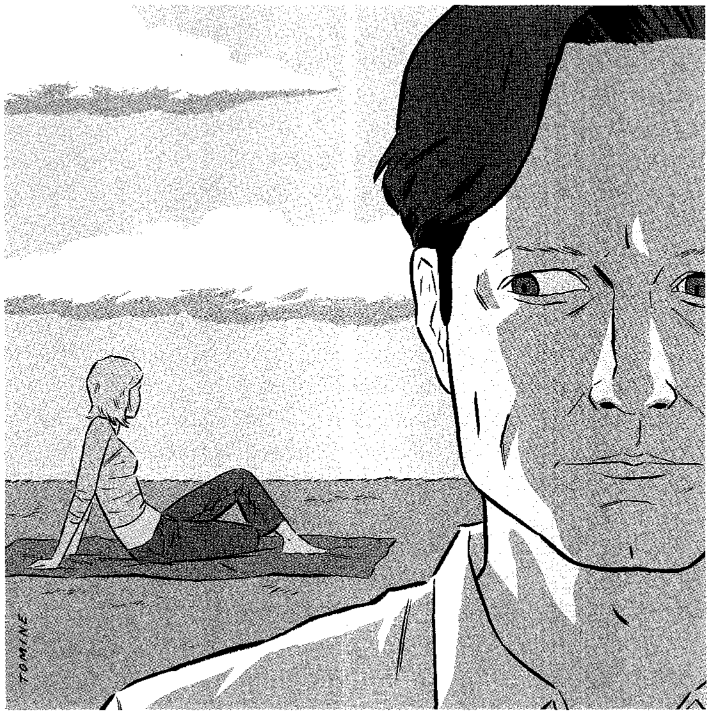
ON TELEVISION

DISORDERLY CONDUCT

The anatomy of a troubled marriage.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

June being the most favored month for weddings, many people will be too busy making their preparations, tying the knot, and honeymooning in Tuscany to watch "Out of Order," the five-part Showtime miniseries that began on June 1st and will air on Mondays for the rest of the month. Too bad—they'll just have to find out for themselves how deadening a long marriage can be. Mark and Lorna (Eric Stoltz and Felicity Huffman), a Los Angeles screenwriting couple, who are at the cold, blue center of "Out of Order," have been married for sixteen years—actually, sixteen and a half, Mark says, as if he were counting the days—but the partnership is now falling apart. The show was created and written by a real screenwriting couple, Donna and Wayne Powers, who met at the University of Southern California's film school in the early eighties, and whose partnership has evidently not fallen apart: they co-wrote this summer's remake of "The Italian Job."



Kim Dickens and Eric Stoltz in Showtime's "Out of Order."

"Out of Order" is tailor-made for people of a certain age, or, more accurately, of a certain demographic: upper-middle-class, Lexus-buying professionals in their late thirties and forties, who have everything they want except inner peace. They are the kind of people who are often tagged as self-indulgent navel-gazers, and the show, far from avoiding that label, runs right up to it and gives it a big wet kiss. At the beginning of the first episode, we see an image of two naked people floating together underwater in a swimming pool; we can tell that one of them is Stoltz, and we assume that the other is his wife, though we can't see her clearly. Stoltz's Mark breaks into the idyll with a self-conscious voice-over, addressing the audience as "the jury": "Yes, you out there, sitting on the couch with your remote control, gathered around the glow of the modern-day fire. You see, since I was a kid, I imagined my life as a movie, imagined a crew surrounding me, filming my every step. So it's totally appropriate that you, my audience, will decide if I am guilty or not guilty." Of course, TV viewers do judge shows and characters all the time, but normally a show's eagerness to win us over isn't quite so explicit. Mark's opening monologue, in which he asks us to "weigh all of the evidence" before we vote with our remotes, amounts to a sort of special pleading for himself and for the show; and the essential humorlessness of the series, and its aggressive claim to our undivided attention, comes through right away. The poetic image at the beginning of the episode pulls us in, but the voice-over puts us off. We're always hearing about how Hollywood screenwriters get yanked around, and now Mark's doing the same thing to us, acting like an arrogant studio functionary and making assumptions about our willingness to sit through something that isn't "Die Hard 9." Almost makes you want to turn to a rerun of "Cheers," just to spite him.

At first, though, Mark does have our sympathy, because we can see that everyone in his household wants something from him—a point that the show establishes with a breezy, amusing gimmick. The goldfish, the hamsters, the cats, the plants—like Audrey II in "Little Shop of Horrors," they all demand, out loud, to be fed. (And the goldfish has quite a mouth on him—"Feed me, bitch," he growls at Mark.) Ants have taken over the house, and Mark can hear them shouting out a marching song as they course through the kitchen. His eight-year-old son is no different, ordering his father to get him some juice without so much as a please or a thank-you. Mark appears to be a harried single parent, and in a way he is. After taking his son to school, he comes home to find his wife still in bed at eleven-thirty. He tells her that it's a beautiful day, and she just rolls over and faces away from him.

Huffman's Lorna is clinically depressed (it turns out, as we learn in the second episode, that she's bipolar); when she finally gets out of bed and gets dressed, she wears two shades of gray—three, if you include her face. We find out early in the first episode that she experienced something lastingly traumatic as a child, and that she has just had a fresh revelation that has renewed her pain. She tells Mark that it suddenly hit her the night before that the trauma happened to *her*—she touches her chest with her open hand to emphasize the present-tense nature of the pain—and not to a little girl in a photograph, as she had come to think of it. Huffman's per-

ADRIAN TOMINE

formance captures Lorna's agony and terror, her fear that she's "going to fall into a black hole and never come out," and also the aspects of depression that can be so frustrating for those outside it—the unreliability and the excuses that make it hard to tell whether the sufferer is dying inside or getting away with murder. Lorna misses appointments and then promises to set her alarm the next time. She goes off to do an errand, saying she'll be back in half an hour, and instead comes in at three the next morning, drunk and manic.

All this takes a toll on the marriage, but the show doesn't give Lorna a free ride because of her illness—sometimes she's just a jerk—and it's good at demonstrating how the very qualities that brought people together in the first place are often the ones that get on their nerves in the long run. Lorna may have been drawn to Mark's non-macho sweetness and sensitivity, but now, when he whoops with joy during their son's soccer game, she says to him, "You sound like a girl." At the same time, "Out of Order" manages to dramatize the rewards of marriage and family life—such as when Mark and Lorna play a game with their son in which he pretends to be a hot dog and they cover him with ketchup and mustard and pickles—without sentimentalizing them. The hot-dog scene cuts to Lorna coming home at two in the morning, having drunk three doubles and thrown up in the driveway.

As a piece of storytelling, "Out of Order" has a fairly high degree of emotional intelligence, but the devices it relies on to show Mark's self-awareness—and the filmmakers' own self-consciousness about the entertainment business—are, for the most part, old hat. They don't deepen our understanding of the characters or their dilemmas. Mark's feeling of being in a movie is not an unusual one, and the scenes where the camera turns to reveal a cameraman and a soundman hovering nearby, or someone holding cue cards, are mere cleverness. The show has a lot of tricks up its sleeve, but it lacks magic. The strongest scene so far is a straightforward one, in which Lorna confronts her mother and stepfather about their past sins. (Lane Smith and Celia Weston are terrific as the offending parents, who still don't really hear their daughter.) A scene later in the same sequence, a terrifying confrontation between Mark and the man who abused Lorna when she was seven, works because it seems real, not because the filmmakers have signalled to us that it's just a fantasy. (The series' frantic signalling extends to its score, which features too much spare piano served on a bed of strings—the kind of music that is used in TV movies when a terminally ill patient looks out the window, perhaps for the last time, on a rainy winter afternoon.)

"Out of Order" has a solid cast—it also features William H. Macy as a bitter unemployed producer and Peter Bogdanovich as a sleazy director—but it doesn't say anything about Hollywood that we haven't heard a million times before. Kim Dickens has some good moments as Danni, a married woman Mark meets at his son's soccer practice and successfully pursues. Danni is, at least, less cow-eyed than Mark about their affair—when he tells her he has written a poem about an encounter they had in his pool (she, it turns out, is the woman in the opening scene), she says, "Oh, no." Girl, you got *that* right. And there is something funny about Justine Bateman playing a suburban mother of three whose trashy mind is straight out of a Jackie Collins novel—but I have no idea if the humor is intentional.

Though there is some good material here, it is surrounded by so much ponderousness that you wish the producers had taken a strong hand to the Powerses' script, but—oh, no—the Powerses themselves were the executive producers. Perhaps they should join Macy's character in what he calls "movie jail." All too often in "Out of Order," you can't believe you're hearing what you're hearing. Did Mark really just say in voice-over, "I felt like a guest in my own life, as the world spun without me" and "Welcome to my life—the only movie I can't rewrite" and "I know, I know—nobody sympathizes with someone in a Mercedes. But I can't help it—it's the car I drive"? Yes. Yes, he did. At the end of the first episode (which Wayne Powers directed), Mark says that the time has come for the jury to decide his fate. But in many ways this sap has decided his own fate; he has already proved the adage that a person who represents himself in court has a fool for a lawyer. ♦

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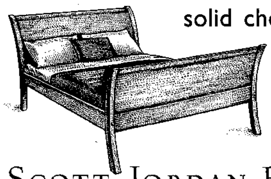

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TRAFFIC JAMS

"The Italian Job" and "Friday Night."

BY DAVID DENBY

In "The Italian Job," Edward Norton, pulling his chin down and showing off a mean little spot of beard, plays a bad egg with superlative skill. Norton is a thief who betrays his colleagues, and he gives each of his lines a nasty little sting. Always intelligent and incisive, he's one of those rare actors who hold the audience's attention with everything they say—Jimmy Cagney and Edward G. Robinson had that gift, too—and whenever he shows up in this elaborate caper film he brings the show to life. But then Mark Wahlberg, as a good, loyal thief, tries to respond to Norton, and the tension leaks out of the scenes. Wahlberg is such a mild fellow. As a lead, he's been effective only twice—in "Boogie Nights," in which all but one part of him was underdeveloped, and his quiet demeanor seemed amusingly right for a man inordinately blessed (or was it cursed?) by nature; and in the underrated, underattended "The Yards," in which he played a convict who returns home and tries to hide in semi-anonymity. Wahlberg is naturally a B-movie artifact—he even looks a little like the old Warners' punk, Elisha Cook, Jr.—and the notion of him as a star is turning into a talent-agency put-on. He's perfectly pleasant, but there's no excitement in his voice, and nothing burns in his eyes. In "The Italian Job," he comes off as an unassuming young man hoping to learn something by hanging out—he shoots baskets in between the action sequences. The way the story is set up, Norton and Wahlberg both work for master criminal Donald Sutherland, and, in a kind of prologue, the three men and the rest of their gang steal thirty-five million dollars in gold bars from a gloomy old palazzo in Venice. Then Norton kills Sutherland and makes off with the swag. Wahlberg and the others, joined by Sutherland's daughter, played by Charlize Theron, track Norton down in plush Los Angeles, where he's living in a big house and slowly selling off the bars to the Ukrainian Mafia. "The Italian Job" is good summer fun, but it's only about two-thirds the picture it could have been. Since Edward Norton has nothing to play against, the rivalry at the heart of the movie never heats up.

"The Italian Job" is vaguely based on a 1969 caper picture of the same name, which, for its first forty minutes, exists on a high plane of wit. As a young thief, Michael Caine has an irresistibly bright-eyed eagerness, and Noël Coward, in the master-criminal role, plans the job from prison, where he lives like a lord, complete with dressing gown and prison-guard servants. (Coward enunciates the word "toilet" as if he were saying "diamond.") The movie emerged from the period of British insouciance that produced the Beatles and "Beyond the Fringe" and such suave entertainments as the early Bonds and "The League of Gentlemen." What the creators of the new version—the writers Donna and Wayne Powers, Neal Purvis, and Robert Wade, and the director F. Gary Gray—have taken from the old one is not the wit or the plot but the complicated chases and the idea of a heist being carried off in the middle of an artificially created traffic jam. They do the mechanical things very capably—much better than the earlier filmmakers. The camera rises majestically over the Dolomites, speedboats in Venice churn up the canals and head into blind turns, and Los Angeles gets beautifully snarled. There's a dangerous-looking chase in which a small black helicop-

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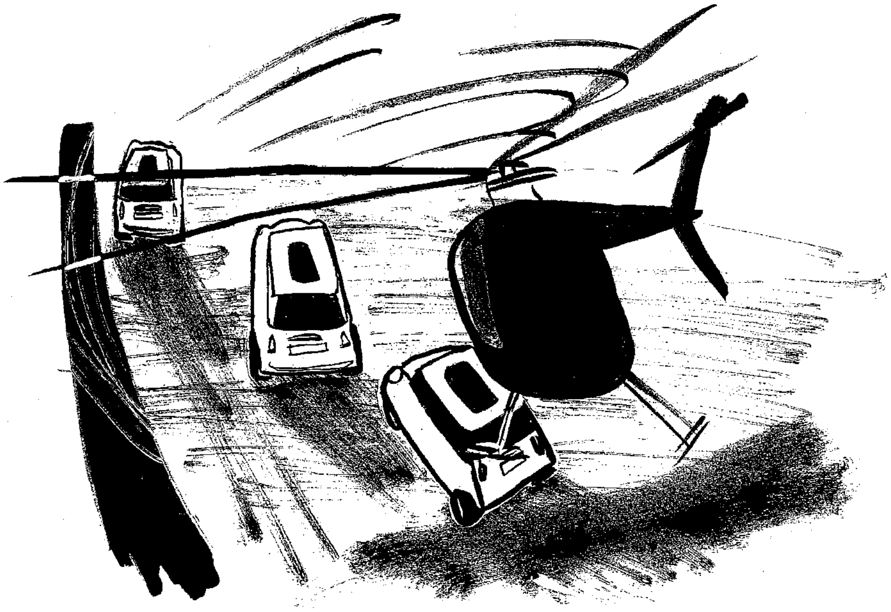
ter hovers right over a car in the streets of Los Angeles, and Gray uses the getaway cars—buzzing, squared-off Minis—extremely well, speeding the tiny vehicles into a subway tunnel just ahead of a train, making them jump and spin and flip like toys. This action movie has not been repainted digitally, and it's nice to see the laws of time and space paid at least minimal respect for a change.



"The Italian Job" is one action movie that has not been repainted digitally.

TOM BACHTELL

Some of the minor players in the gang are terrific, particularly Seth Green (from the "Austin Powers" series), who has an adolescent petulance that he's developed into a considerable comic shtick, and the rapper Mos Def, as an explosives expert who can't contain his amazement as he blows things up with tiny bombs strategically placed. Yet even though everything in this summer spectacle moves—heavy safes and trucks fall through the air—not much really happens. "The Italian Job" is skillful but emotionally dead—a stylish exercise. Charlize Theron has creamy golden skin and a dazzling smile, but there's a depressing blankness in her face. The most expressive thing she does in the movie is turn over in bed when her pa calls her on the telephone to say hello.

In "Friday Night," an enraging new film by Claire Denis ("Beau Travail"), a thirty-fivish Parisienne, Laure (Valérie Lemercier), packs everything into boxes and prepares to leave her apartment. The next day, she will move in with her boyfriend, and now she's as good as homeless for the night. In these opening scenes, Denis doesn't appear to care much about shot-to-shot continuity, but she maintains moods by cutting from the middle of one small-scale activity to another—the heroine sighing irritably, bathing, flinging herself in boredom onto a bed. The little bumps in physical movement are meant, I think, to suggest shifts in consciousness emerging from specific acts and sensations. The over-all feeling is one of subdued melancholy, with the Eiffel Tower glowing at night outside the window, and Dickon Hinchliffe's music holding the audience in suspense like salmon in aspic. Laure is caught between past and future, between solitude and devotion—though we get the sense that she's not very happy about moving in with her man.

She climbs into her car to visit friends for dinner, but one of France's periodic public-transportation strikes is under way, and the drivers, locked in place, face one another in fury. Again, Denis's discontinuous cutting works effectively to suggest restlessness, anxiety, even paranoia. But it also has a weakness: you can't quite tell where people are in relation to one another. In closeup, a handsome man is seen staring at something. But is he looking at Laure? Does she see him looking? We can't make out whether the ambiguity is intentional or just a case of lazy technique. A slightly mocking voice on Laure's radio suggests that drivers should pick up strangers and give them a lift, and, even though no one is moving, this stranger climbs into Laure's car (with her permission), settles himself, and lights up. For seventy years, the elaborate hand-and-mouth ballet of match, cigarette, and slowly exhaled smoke has served as punctuation in French cinema. But here it's not punctuation; it's discourse. Neither Laure nor the man speaks.

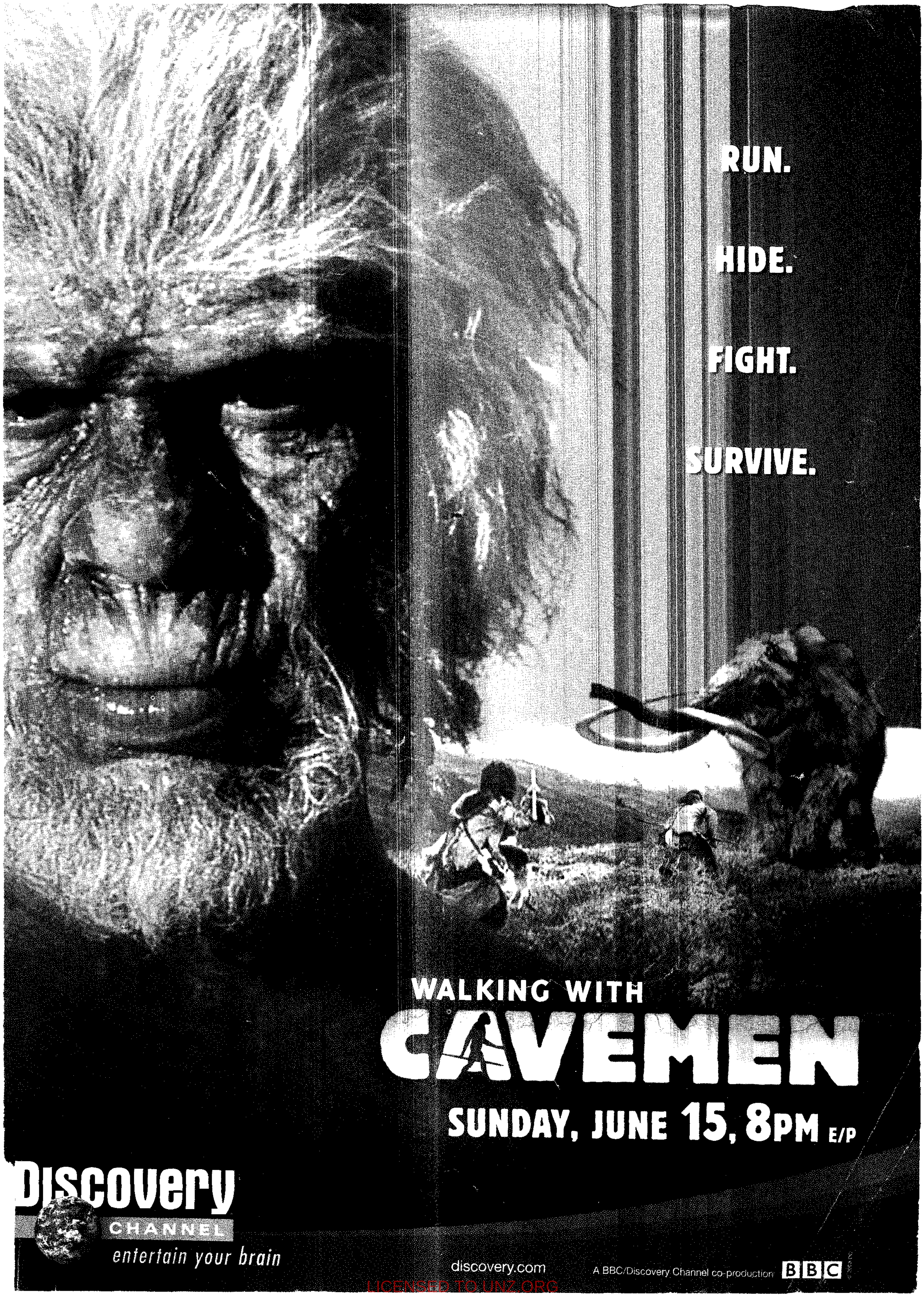
I won't continue this non-blow-by-non-blow description, except to say that at a certain point the man, Jean (Vincent Lindon), gets out of the car, and Laure, after a pause, follows him, finds him in a bar, and goes with him to a sordid and empty hotel, where they make love in profoundest silence. "Friday Night," then, is another one of those films, like "Last Tango in Paris" and the recent "Intimacy," in which a man and a woman want nothing from each other but sex. In those movies, however, the silences eventually give way to a torrent of talk. Is it possible that Denis is just uncomfortable with words? "Beau Travail" didn't have much dialogue, either, and what there was of it was fragmentary and unconvincing. In "Friday Night," after perhaps forty minutes, Jean finally says to Laure, "Your hand smells like rubber."

The movie is not a bore, exactly, but it's certainly a stunt and a disappointment, for at first the situation is provocative. Vincent Lindon is tough-looking, a man in his forties with humorous eyes, a thick chest and strong back, a pleasant expansion of gut. He gives the impression that he's been around; he exudes calm and self-assurance. Valérie Lemercier is not beautiful, but she has a slightly crooked smile that's intriguing, and her Laure does odd, wonderful things, like blow-drying her thick dark hair with the car heater. The movie is meant to be an expression of pure freedom, but of course endless silence is a kind of prison, and words can be just as erotic as acts. "Friday Night" is about a momentary connection made in the night, yet Denis's technique produces disconnection. The movie is dark-toned and rather furtive, its emotional transactions attenuated to the point of nullity. A perfect one-night stand is no doubt a familiar fantasy, but this movie has been made without fantasy. When Laure smiles the morning after, we can't tell what she's thinking of. ♦

THE CLERK'S TALE

I am thirty-three and working in an expensive clothier,
selling suits to men I call "Sir."
These men are muscled, groomed and cropped—
with wives and families that grow exponentially.
Mostly I talk of rep ties and bow ties,
of full-Windsor knots and half-Windsor knots,
of tattersall, French cuff, and English spread collars,
of foulards, neats, and internationals,
of pincord, hound's tooth, nailhead and sharkskin.
I often wear a blue pin-striped suit.
My hair recedes and is going gray at the temples.
On my cheeks there are a few pimples.
For my terrible eyesight, horn-rimmed spectacles.
One of my fellow-workers is an old homosexual
who works hard and wears bracelets with jewels.
No one can rival his commission checks.
On his break he smokes a Benson & Hedges cigarette,
puffing expectantly as a Hollywood starlet.
He has carefully applied a layer of Clinique bronzer
to enhance the tan on his face and neck.
His hair is gone except for a few strands
which are combed across his scalp.
He examines his manicured lacquered nails.
I admire his studied attention to details:
his tie stuck to his shirt with masking tape,
his teeth capped, his breath mint in place.
The old homosexual and I laugh in the back
over a coarse joke involving an octopus.
Our banter is staccato, staged and close
like those "Spanish Dances" by Granados.
I sometimes feel we are in a musical—
gossiping backstage between our numbers.
He drags deeply on his cigarette.
Most of his life is over.
Often, he refers to himself as "an old faggot."
He does this bemusedly, yet timidly.
I know why he does this.
He does this because his acceptance is finally complete—
and complete acceptance is always
bittersweet. Our hours are long. Our backs bent.
We are more gracious than English royalty.
We dart amongst the aisles tall as hedgerows.
Watch us fade into the merchandise.
How we set up and take apart mannequins
as if we were performing autopsies.
A naked body, without pretense, is of no use.
It grows late.
I hear the front metal gate close down.
We begin folding the ties correctly according to color.
The shirts—Oxfords, broadcloths, pinpoints—
must be sized, stacked or rehashed.
The old homosexual removes his right shoe,
allowing his gigantic bunion to swell.
There is the sound of cash being counted—
coins clinking, bills swishing, numbers whispered—
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . .
We are changed when the transactions are done—
older, dirtier, dwarfed.
A few late customers gawk in at us.
We say nothing. Our silence will not be breached.
The lights go off, one by one—
the dressing-room lights, the mirror lights.
Then it is very late. How late? Eleven?
We move to the gate. It goes up.
The gate's grating checkers our cheeks.
This is the Mall of America.
The light is bright and artificial,
yet not dissimilar to that found in a Gothic cathedral.
You must travel down the long hallways to the exits
before you encounter natural light.
One final formality: the manager checks our bags.
The old homosexual reaches into his over-the-shoulder
leather bag—
the one he bought on his European travels
with his companion of many years.
He finds a stick of lip balm and applies it to his lips
liberally as if shellacking them.
Then he inserts one last breath mint
and offers one to me. The gesture is fraternal
and occurs between us many times.
At last, we bid each other good night.
I watch him fade into the many-tiered parking lot,
where the thousands of cars have come
and are now gone. This is how our day ends.
This is how our day always ends.
Sometimes snow falls like rice.
See us take to our dimly lit exits—
disappearing into the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul;
Minneapolis is sleek and St. Paul,
named after the man who had to be shown,
is smaller, older, and somewhat withdrawn.
Behind us, the moon pauses over the vast egg-like dome of
the mall.
See us loosening our ties among you.
We are alone.
There is no longer any need to express ourselves.

—*Spencer Reece*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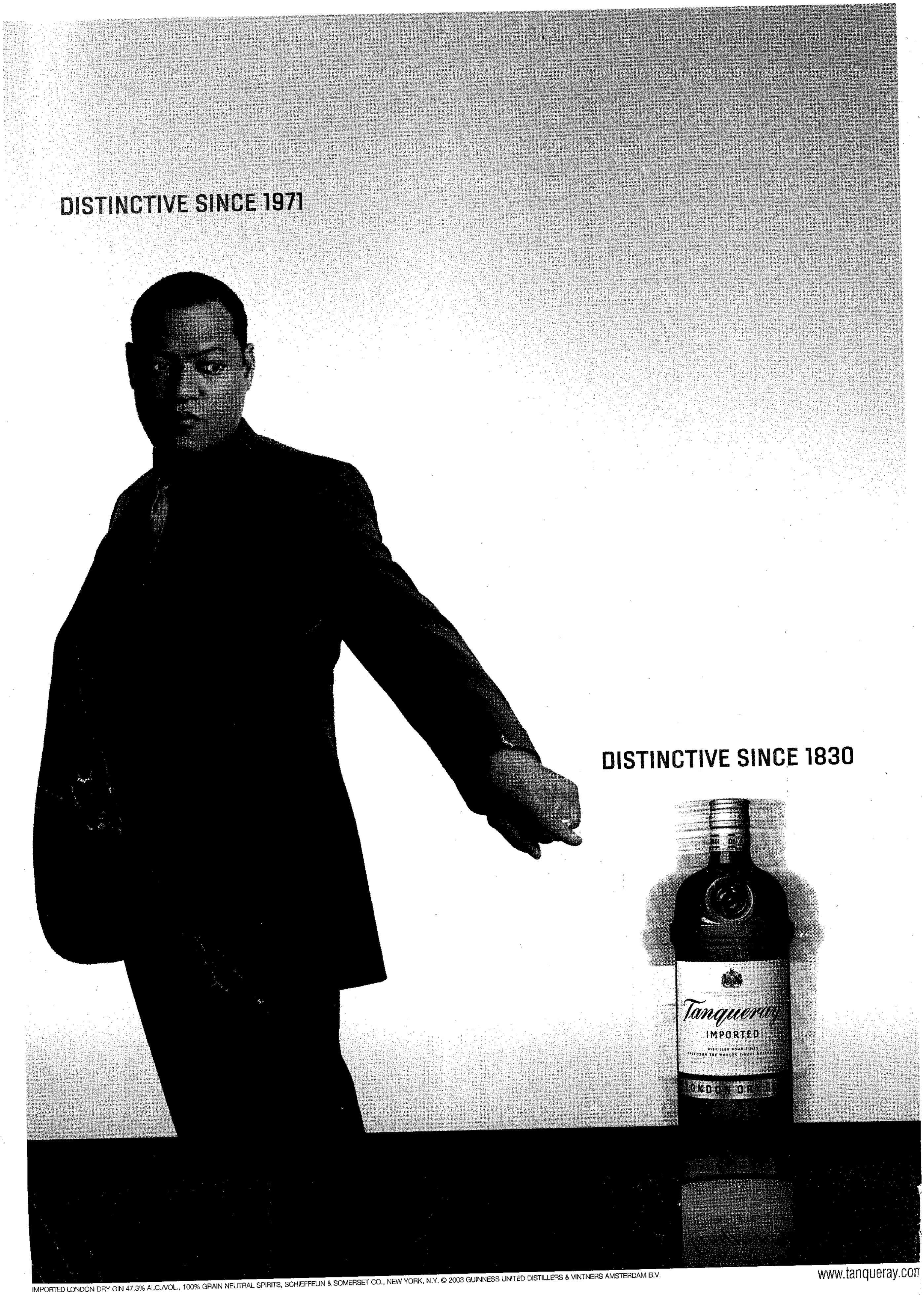
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